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ABSTRACT

This "experience survey" is part of an effort by the Office of Child Development to increase the number of adoptive families available for black children in need of placement. An "experience survey" is a profile of opinions among a group selected because of especially relevant experience or information. In this survey, the 100 respondents in 5 large cities included adoptive parents, members of social agencies, and strategically placed members of the community. Interviews and survey content covered these main points: (1) what impels people to adopt children, (2) what deters people from adopting children, (3) advantages and disadvantages of different types of adoptive placements, and (4) advantages and disadvantages of different recruitment methods. The data collected is therefore of two kinds: (1) information about prevailing attitudes and assumptions, and (2) information about recruitment methods that have or have not proved effective and interpretations concerning reasons for the results. Results are given in words rather than numbers in order to present the main patterning of opinions rather than an exact count. (Author/AJ)

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FAMILIES FOR BLACK CHILDREN

the search for adoptive parents

an experience survey

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This is a report of informed opinion--the opinion of a wide range of individuals concerned with or part of the black community, the opinion of adoptive parents, and the opinion of social workers involved in the adoption of black children. All have contributed freely their information, ideas, and suggestions for recruiting more families for black children who need permanent homes.

We hope that our readers will use these suggestions as a beginning, from which they will go on to build and develop programs in all communities in this country. This Office will continue to provide leadership and national coordination in this effort; but it is only through special efforts in each locale, tailored to the special needs and characteristics of the community, that we can hope to solve these problems. These issues have broad social causes, but they must finally be dealt with in the small intimate fabric of child, family, and neighborhood.

Edward Zigler

Edward Zigler, Director
Office of Child Development

Charles P. Gershenson

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This "experience survey" is part of the effort by the Office of Child Development to increase the number of adoptive families available for black children in need of placement.

The magnitude and urgency of the need are serious. According to the latest available estimate (for 1969), "the percentage of all children adopted who are black or belong to other minority races has not risen significantly despite special efforts by social agencies to find adoptive homes for them. In 1969, children from these groups represented an estimated 11 percent of all children adopted--12 percent of relative adoptions and 10 percent of non-relative adoptions. They numbered nearly 19,000, of whom about 14,000 were black children".[1*]

A very much smaller proportion of black children than of white children available for adoption are actually placed in adoptive families. A recent study by the Child Welfare League of America finds that, in 240 agencies providing racial data on approved homes and children available for adoption, there are 116 white homes approved for every 100 white children available, and only 39 nonwhite homes approved for every 100 nonwhite children reported as needing adoptive placement.[2] And many black children who need adoptive placement are not reported to agencies.[3]

In order to have as solid a basis as possible for planning this effort, it was decided to consult, on a systematic basis, people with experience in adoptions and people with a knowledge of the communities from whom more adoptive parents could be recruited.

The study was undertaken, not with the idea that our respondents could spell out for us the steps toward a successful recruitment program, but rather with the belief that they could define for us some crucial elements that must be taken into account in planning such a program. These elements include incentives that could be built up in order to increase the number of adoptions, deterrents that must be coped with in order to remove obstacles to adoption, and facts or beliefs related to recruitment methods. It would then be our task to utilize the information for more effective planning.

The information is of two kinds: (1) information about prevailing attitudes and assumptions that may or may not be correct, but that must

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* Notes and references are given in the section starting on page 67.

be taken into account; (2) information about recruitment methods that have or have not proved effective and interpretations concerning reasons for the results. Analysis of the second type clearly requires differentiation between those who speak on the basis of experience and those who do not.

METHOD OF STUDY

The method used is a modification of the "experience survey" developed by Stuart Cook and his colleagues.[4] Such a survey does not employ a statistically selected cross-section, but attempts to tap the opinions of individuals in strategic positions with regard to the kinds of information desired. The product is not an opinion poll, but rather a profile of opinions among a group selected because of especially relevant experience or information. (See Appendixes for more detailed notes on method and respondents.)

The one hundred respondents, in five large cities, included adoptive parents, members of social agencies, and strategically placed members of the community--referred to as "community representatives". Interviewers included four social workers and one sociologist, all of whom are black except one social worker and all female except the sociologist. Of the 100 respondents, 78 were black. (See Table 1, page 76.)

Interviewers were asked to cover the same points in each interview. Wording and order were flexible, answers were recorded as fully as possible, and respondents were encouraged to volunteer additional information. Interviews averaged about two hours in length.

Results are given in words rather than in numbers. Numerical proportions, where indicated, are derived from strict coding and tabulation of the data. However, they are offered as indications of opinion preponderances and divisions rather than as precise percentages, and the analysis is qualitative as well as quantitative. The purpose is to present the main patterning of opinions rather than an exact count, which in this type of study would have little significance.

Excerpts from the responses are quoted to illustrate or elaborate opinions summarized in the text, and do not necessarily reflect frequency of occurrence.

Responses are not assumed to reflect the proportions of the general public that hold the various views reported. They do, however, offer

a profile of opinions and experiences highly pertinent to developing ways of increasing the number of adoptive homes for black children in need of placement.

Main points covered in the interview:

What impels people to adopt children
What deters people from adopting children
Advantages and disadvantages of different types of adoptive placements
Advantages and disadvantages of different recruitment methods

FAMILIES FOR BLACK CHILDREN

"A child is a joy."

"Adoption is a means of helping someone while helping yourself."

"People just don't know the magnitude of the problem and they should be told about it."

"Voluntary agencies, in my feeling, haven't put forth the effort to attract black parents. When they have, they've had failures, so they say they can't do it. They've developed great plans, but don't implement them. They think there's no black parent who will adopt. This is the same thing found in schools where white teachers feel a black child can't and won't learn. They expect failure as does a voluntary agency."

"Black people have been adopting for years; they just didn't formalize it. They have been as suspicious of agencies as the latter were of them. And we all well know which suspicion came first."

"One of the luxuries that black people have enjoyed in this country is that everybody seems to know what they need and how they should feel and so they begin to anticipate things."

CAN ENOUGH ADOPTIVE FAMILIES BE FOUND?

Optimism prevails among the respondents about the possibility of substantially increasing the number of adoptive families available for black children in need of placement. The respondents who hazard an opinion on this point (almost two-thirds) divide rather evenly between a definite belief that enough families could be found if a real effort were made, and (a little more often) that perhaps enough could be found. "The homes are there...Agencies have not reached them."

In view of the large number needing placement (a number regularly cited at the outset of the interview, and already known to some of the respondents), it is noteworthy that only one definitely stated the belief that enough adoptive homes could not be found. Proportions leaning to various positions on this point differed little among types of respondent--whether black or white, male or female, agency member, adoptive parent, or community representative.

"Really trying", as defined by both positive and tentative optimists, means doing a number of things not done, or not done enough, now. It also means not doing a number of things that are now done, or are believed to be done, by those responsible for finding adoptive homes. It means, in addition, changes in some underlying attitudes and assumptions. All of these will be discussed in the following pages.

Of course there are varying shades and conflicts of opinion, and the "do's" of some respondents are the "don'ts" of others. In presenting the different points, an effort will be made to include also the "counter-points", and to indicate proportions leaning one way or another.

Deciding factors

Implicit in ideas about whether enough families could be found, and how to find them, are opinions about why people do or do not adopt children. Most recommendations involve ways of encouraging desire to adopt, eliminating or minimizing valid reasons for not adopting, and clearing away misconceptions that block or diminish the impulse to offer a home to a child.

Whether potential adoptive parents become actual adoptive parents obviously depends on many factors that are not determined by the efforts or lapses of those responsible for home-finding. Our respondents discussed in detail the individual needs, beliefs, and feelings that incline a potential adoptive parent for or against opening his home to a child, as well as the practices and policies that encourage or discourage the inclination.

They do not necessarily assume that a single factor or type of factor would in itself determine the result, but suggest rather that a decision for or against adopting would be the resultant of many interacting elements. Some of these elements would be more and some less influential in the final decision. And often it would be a decision by default, because little or no thought had been given to the subject.

WHY PEOPLE ADOPT CHILDREN

Child-centered reasons

The most pervasive single reason for adopting, according to our respondents, is love of children, enjoyment of them, liking to have them around. "A child is a joy." This emotional warmth toward children is mentioned explicitly by over half of the respondents and implied by many of the others. Even those who cite more "self-centered" reasons for adopting are likely to indicate that these impel only some adoptive applicants, who diverge from the norm of loving and wanting children for their own sakes. "It's natural to want children around"; "people love children". A few respondents indicate that love of children is stronger and more pervasive among blacks than among whites. A white social worker comments that "agencies have no idea of the Black community's great love for children." Some also speak of pity for a child who has no home--"every child is entitled to a family".

> "...It had never crossed my mind that we could really enjoy a baby so until I saw the other couples and how much time and care and how strong they felt about adopting a youngster."

Most of those who say people adopt because they love children refer to it as natural and inevitable. A few, however, see the feeling as culturally induced: "It's a matter of cultural conditioning--part of the Judeo-Christian ethic."

Many link the "natural" and "instinctive" love of children with the need to feel complete, and to receive as well as give: "they need to love and be loved in return"; "people need objects to love"; "fear that you will grow old and won't have anybody of your own"; "an individual can feel incomplete without a family"; "a family is not a family without children".

A reason specified by less than half, but probably assumed by others, is inability to have a child of one's own, coupled with desire to have children for the various other reasons noted. However, it is by no means taken for granted that only the childless do or should adopt. On the contrary, there is occasional explicit approval of adding a child to a family whose parents have had several and "are confident of their ability to look after children". "Many people with children are now adopting, so it must be for the child's need and not for themselves."

Mentioned far less frequently than warmth and love, but referred to by more than one in three, are reasons relating to social consciousness or conscience. Among these are a sense of responsibility for rearing children who need care and protection and an ethical or religious belief that this is a good thing to do. Those who invoke social conscience occasionally suggest that some people adopt because they are keenly aware of the "population explosion", and think it is better to adopt a child who is already here than to bring another one into the world. One or two comment that they have heard this kind of reasoning from whites but not from blacks.

> "When you love kids, you just want all of them to be happy and all of them to have a good life and all of them to have a good existence so that the advantage is that you would be able to provide this, to give to somebody who may not have had it. Secondly, it is good, it is good to be raising kids. It is good for kids to be happy. It is not their fault that they are here, so why should they have to pay the penalty of being unhappy. Another advantage is that you can see something that you are doing, that you did on your own because nobody makes you adopt kids, so one of the advantages is that you, if you don't have nothing that seems like it's yours or seems to really be only yours, then adoption might be a way to get some of that feeling that you need to have."

"All I want to do is give them a chance, so that they won't have to go into life and become grown and have known life as something that has only had to be a failure to them."

"People are becoming more concerned about each other, and do not have to reproduce to emphasize their own egos."

Parent-centered reasons

The reasons for adopting, just summarized, are child-centered in the sense that they focus, directly or indirectly, on the child's need or appeal. Almost as frequent are parent-centered reasons, involving convenience, preference, or ego needs. Unlike the child-centered reasons, these tend to be attributed only to some adoptive parents, rather than to all or most. Nevertheless, over half of the respondents mention one or more of the parent-centered reasons.

The most frequently invoked parent-centered reason for adopting is a sense of something lacking and a wish for self-fulfillment. In contrast with the child-centered desire for completeness of family, this sentiment is seen as stemming from a felt lack rather than a felt impulse to share and give. The difference is tenuous, but it comes through clearly in the respondents' comments. It is presented as an ego need of the parent rather than as a response to children. The self-fulfillment or loneliness motive is not necessarily seen as self-serving, but is viewed rather as a natural human yearning that can be satisfied with benefit to the adoptive parent and also to the child.

Mentioned less often than the self-fulfillment or loneliness theme, and attributed to a smaller proportion of adoptive parents, is the wish to serve the convenience or the situation of the adoptive parents--referred to in some way by a majority of the respondents. Included in this group of motives would be desire to avoid pregnancy, either because of medical contraindications or reluctance for the woman to stop working over a period of months. (Inability to have a child, noted above, is viewed in a different light from desire to avoid pregnancy.)

Another parent-centered motive is the hope of strengthening or improving the family composition. When the main purpose is to bolster up a faltering marriage, the view of the respondents tends to be skeptical or critical. On the other hand, when the purpose is to avoid the problems of an "only child", or to add another sibling for greater companionship among the children, the arrangement tends to be seen as beneficial to all concerned. Desire to improve family composition includes making sure of obtaining the preferred sex or coloring in a child, and avoiding risk of physical defects or severe mental disability--motives that evoke varying degrees of simple acceptance or mild disapproval.

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The status-conformity motive appears less often and calls forth scant applause. Some people, the respondents say, want a child because it's "the thing" to have a family, because all their friends and relatives have children, because they want to show that they, too, can raise a family like everyone else, because there is social and familial pressure to have children, because they may win social approval or "a pat on the head from the boss".

A few speak of the desire to "have a real stake in the future", to "leave something to posterity", or (very rarely) to have an heir for their property. One respondent comments that this last motive is less important with Negroes than with whites, "because we don't have that much."

> "Fear that you will grow old and won't have anybody of your own. I know I didn't want to grow old without children of my own."
>
> "I guess when you have no family, you want a family. People like to have someone around in their own image, so they want a baby. We do live in a family oriented society."
>
> "Most of your friends who have children make you feel like you are missing something if you don't have any. You feel like you don't belong and don't fit when they talk about their children."
>
> "That was a case of saving a sinking marriage. The children kept the couple together physically and even strengthened the relationship. I guess the kids are really better off than where they were. I don't really condone this though."

WHY PEOPLE DON'T ADOPT: PARENT-ORIENTED REASONS

Discussion of ways to increase the number of adoptions is based not only on beliefs about what impels people to adopt and what deters them from adopting, but also--in both categories--on what is or is not likely to be affected by the efforts of those concerned with finding more families for black children.

On the whole, deterrents are viewed as more accessible to such efforts than are the reasons for adoption. Deterrents are seen as obstructing or inhibiting desire to adopt, and suggested remedies are for the most part directed to freeing the desire by removing or reducing deterrents. Accordingly, deterrents receive the major share of attention; and, among deterrents, the chief focus is on those seen as amenable to some degree of change. Although virtually all the respondents gave reasons why people do adopt a child, more reasons, more specifics, and more time were given for deterrents. Also, discussions of some deterrents brought out greater intensity of feeling.

Recommendations and suggestions, implicit or explicit in many of the comments about deterrents, will be covered partly in this section and partly in later sections of the report.

Deterrents to adoption, as discussed by our respondents, are of six main kinds: (1) lack of public information; (2) anxieties of potential adoptive parents; (3) possible characteristics of the child; (4) adverse attitudes of others; (5) legal complications; (6) characteristics of social agencies.

Lack of public information

Since agency members and adoptive parents were selected as "experts" in the problem of placing black children, it is not surprising that most of them were at least moderately aware of its existence and extent, and the majority were keenly aware. Very few were wholly uninformed about it, although several had not realized its magnitude. The "community representatives" were selected for their knowledge of the local scene rather than of the problem. Accordingly, as anticipated, more than half of them had given the matter little thought, and six of them had hardly heard about it.

Despite their own relatively high awareness, there was strong consensus among the respondents that the general public has little if any idea how many black children desperately need families. Implicit in many of their suggestions, reported in a later section, is the assumption that, in order to meet the need for more families, more people need to realize how large and how urgent it is. More by implication than by explicit statement, lack of information is included among major deterrents to adoption.

Several point out that other issues and problems have higher priority for those who are "working on how to solve large social problems, so that adoptions become very small in terms of what they are thinking about". A community representative states quite simply that, of all the problems besetting the black community, adoption has the lowest priority in his own schedule. Those ranking higher are "employment, housing, gangs, political power, bread-and-butter issues, Police

Department, and drugs". Other respondents mention civil rights, "careless health care", and "arbitrary welfare administration".

These are the exceptions. For the most part, even those who had been unaware of the need for adoptive families responded with interest and concern when the situation was presented to them. The exceptional response merits notice, nevertheless, as a reminder that any social problem must compete for attention with many others--and also, perhaps, as a reminder that (to judge by the competitors listed)--social problems are inter-related and none "is an iland, entire of it selfe".

Although only one in ten refers to the higher priority of other problems, it is as likely to be brought out by agency members as by community representatives, who have responsibility for broader programs.

> "Problems in housing, education, and employment are long standing and have engaged the efforts of the people most likely to be helpful in presenting the need for adoptive parents. However, we have seen a gradually increasing positive response to our efforts, and the number of nonwhite children placed...has increased from 25 in 1967 to 101 in 1969."

Anxieties of potential adoptive parents

Economic insecurity. By far the leading single deterrent reported is economic insufficiency and inadequacy, mentioned by at least two-thirds of the respondents. Again and again it is pointed out that black families have lower incomes, less job security, fewer economic reserves than white families, and that the incomes, though generally lower, more often represent two wage earners--generalizations fully borne out by reports from the Bureau of the Census and the Department of Labor, among others.[5] Even when they are making enough to live on, respondents reiterate, they are not sure how long this will be so.

Limitations of income, some add, mean limitations of space, and inadequate housing. Many black families have neither enough room nor enough income to accommodate new members. Some are said to fear also that, if an additional child should need expensive medical care, they would not be able to meet the bills. Economic fears are seen as especially high now, with rising unemployment and sinking confidence in the job market.

"...one of the big problems is this thing about jobs and economics...even my own situation where I'm working now...pays me a rather nice salary but I'm not sure about next year or the year after and most of the people who are working on jobs who are black have that kind of insecurity."

"You know also how much blacks fear the loss of security. This limitation of security, not knowing where the next money will be coming from, is a very important fact of life."

Linked with low and uncertain income, some respondents say, is the proverbial readiness of needy black families to care for the children of equally needy relatives, especially for grandchildren. "Black families have a remarkable story in what they have done for grandchildren." Families who do not have enough themselves, but nevertheless have accepted responsibility for an extra child or two, without the formality of legal adoption, are hardly in a position to undertake more.

"Black families have traditionally cared for others and legalizing adoption just isn't part of their thinking."

"In any black family or community, someone is always assuming the responsibility for someone else's child. Sometimes temporarily--sometimes permanently."

"There are more unofficial adoptions in the black communities than official adoptions through agencies."

A number of the recommendations reported in a later section of this report are aimed at diminishing the extent to which inadequate and unstable income acts as a deterrent to adoption.

One concomitant of inadequate income is mentioned by very few, but is dwelt on with some emotion by them and is clearly relevant to decisions about subsidized placements with inner-city-families--namely, the fear of many inner-city mothers for the physical and psychological safety of their natural children. This fear has been documented repeatedly in studies of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program. The question implied or stated by the few who mention it is whether the welfare of a child is served by placing him in this environment. A Head Start paraprofessional says that she has wondered whether she owed it to her own children to try to place them in foster care, "away from the ghetto".

A social worker reports that her agency's "community organizer" has been invited to speak before many local groups, but that "on more than one occasion, the increased gang activity and crime in the streets had people so aroused that she was unable to discuss the need for adoptive homes."

> "I'm against bringing kids into this area because of the terrible schools."
>
> "The all-prevalent gang structure is a hanging ghetto threat to harrassed and tired parents. Some women, who are struggling to work and send their boys to school with lunch money, find the kids going hungry as they pay gangs 75 cents weekly. Some send the children back South to live with relatives. Some plan to go back South themselves, figuring they can always get something to do on the farms."

There are a very few counter-statements with regard to economic inadequacy: that a child is not "all that much" of a financial burden, but will "fit right into the budget". This note, however, is rarely sounded, and is drowned out by the emphasis on economic insecurity and anxiety. [6]

For the most part, anxieties about income are seen as realistic and legitimate. Even those who are making a good living today, it is pointed out, may feel insecure about the future, especially under present conditions. However, although two-thirds of the respondents recognize the realistic economic problems faced by so many black families, some of these same respondents (and some others) think that addiction to a comfortable life style, carefree enjoyment of hard-won prosperity, career ambitions, and desire for upward mobility, deter some relatively successful middle-class blacks from considering adoption. Only one or two assert that, among those above the poverty line, black families are already adopting at a higher rate than whites, and cite a study documenting the statement. [7]

> "...a lot of people...who make enough money to take care of a child...are so busy rewarding themselves that they just haven't had time to really consider doing anything in adoption."
>
> "Families have many other middle-class symbols: travel, community action, increasing material comforts, and community recognition as individuals. This is why the lower middle class will produce more adoptive homes; family activity as we have known it still exists there."

"Someone else's child". That many black men view adoption as "an affront to the male ego" is a serious deterrent, according to more than one-third of the respondents. They say that "he feels it takes away from his manhood, if an adoption is known", that it amounts to a public "loss of face". The phrase "less than a man" is used more than once: "To consider adoption is an open admission that he is less than a man--he can't produce his own children." Some add that the feeling is stronger for black males than for whites, because white men, traditionally, have had other ways of "proving themselves", but a black man must "give a woman a child" in order to affirm his status as a man, since historically he has been "stripped of all rights except those of a stud". "For many black men, this is all they have to be proud of." "Men have been so brainwashed about their sexual prowess that they believe it." One or two, however, think that white men have a similar "hang-up", but "black men are more honest with themselves" about feeling that adoption, if openly admitted, would "take away from their manhood".

> "Whites have some of these same fears. They bring them to the adoption process and they get worked through in the process. However, blacks have these fears and just don't come in."

A few say that some wives who really want to adopt a child are afraid to do so for fear of "damaging their husband's ego".

> "I don't know how many times I have heard men say 'If I can't have my own I don't wany any.'"

> "I think that there is probably a male bias against adoption. Black males tend to believe that they have more virility than whites. Therefore adopting a child might mean a loss of face. This is particularly true with lower class and lower middle-class males. Virility is highly emphasized. Historically it comes out of slavery....Consequently sterility and impotence are very bad. Many Negroes just can't accept it. My friend X--is an example. He has no children but would never consider adopting any. Some men will even lie about it."

Although many respondents do not raise the point, very few explicitly deny that "men have a certain thing about adoption". Those few, however, deny it emphatically. A social worker of considerable experience says that she sees "no difference between white and black males in this regard". Another remarks that "contrary to popular belief, I

think the black man is very accepting of his infertility if this happens to be the reason for no natural children." And a community representative declares that the "male ego threat" is a stereotype foisted on black males by social workers.

The substantial minority who say that black men believe adoption "takes away from their manhood" do not necessarily see the attitude as unchangeable. One or two think it is less strong among younger and better educated men than among the middle-aged or the less educated. There is also an occasional suggestion that, as new opportunities open up for black men, the definition of "manhood" may acquire different dimensions.

> "...I wonder if we shouldn't do much more in discussing the qualities that make up manliness--like accepting responsibility, working, taking care of one's family. This would help them learn that producing children is not the sole criterion of manliness. If they could see themselves in terms of these other things, they would have less need to hang onto that idea."

The comment that the attitude is found less among younger and better educated than among older and less educated men is in line with a speculation made directly by only one respondent: that the attributed attitude may relate as much to class as to color. The "affront to manhood" idea is strongly reminiscent of the "machismo" or "red-blooded maleness" ideal familiar in descriptions of low-income groups in Latin America and of some low-income groups in the inner cities of the United States. It could be interpreted as part of the life styles among the poor described by Oscar Lewis, among others.[8]

Those who see the male ego threat as a serious deterrent occasionally suggest that the emphasis placed by adoption agencies on fertility investigations and tests for sterility intensifies adverse effects on readiness to adopt a child. Only one or two suggest that more male social workers might help. "After all, if the guy is already hung up on manhood and then some woman is sitting across the desk and calling the punches, it's just too much."

Comments about this deterrent are as apt to come from white as from black respondents, and the frequency differs little between men and women. Adoptive parents are somewhat less likely than others to mention the threat to the male ego as a serious deterrent--perhaps because they have not found it one, or have worked through it. One of them comments, "My wife was in the mood to adopt a child before I was. Men...think it will hurt their masculinity."

Reluctance to bring up someone else's child is not attributed exclusively to men. While it is generally assumed that wives are likely

to be more eager than their husbands to adopt a child, a few of the respondents say that some women also do not want to accept another person's child as their own--a viewpoint usually repudiated by the one who reports it.

> "I don't get this attitude, 'I don't want someone else's child'. Well, their husband was someone else's child and he can hurt you a lot more than a child who hurts you because he's a child and just learning."
>
> "I think this is just in their minds and they don't really know what they're saying. It's not anybody else's; after you get it, it's yours."

Anxieties about the child

Anxiety about the kind of child they would receive is viewed as far less of a deterrent to potential adoptive parents than concern about their own security or image. Nevertheless, well over one-third of the respondents do mention such anxiety as a possible deterrent. For the most part it centers on the idea of "bad blood". Would the child of unknown parents--parents either unable or unwilling to rear the child themselves--inherit undesirable physical, mental, or moral characteristics? Would such a child inherit tendencies to alcoholism, insanity, drug addiction, "character criminality"? Would he be dull or even mentally retarded? Would one want to accept as his own a child "tainted" with the fact and surrounding circumstances of illegitimacy? "They think it must have something wrong with it, if it's up for adoption."

> "If you could eliminate the mental fears some of the husbands have about adopting children, that the child's father might have been a liar, so therefore, the child might be a liar, and a lot of this hereditary stuff, you probably could sell a greater number of homes on the adoption idea."
>
> "Yes, people always worry about the background of a child whose parents aren't known....Potential adoptive parents would have to protect their child from accusations, like he's a drug addict because his parents were drug addicts."

The respondents who mention fears about heredity as obstacles to adoption tend to regard them as myths to be exploded rather than as

valid reasons against adopting a child. References to them are often coupled with recommendations for the kind of public education that would inform people about "what is transmitted genetically and what socio-culturally". And a few predict that such doubts about the child's future development tend to evaporate when applicants actually see the child. "Once they see it they couldn't care less about its background."

Several think that the "bad blood myth" is becoming less potent than formerly, as people become better educated. And a few point out that some people may prefer adoption precisely because they can see the child and "know it's in good health, whereas a natural child might not be". Ability to choose the preferred sex and coloring has already been mentioned as an inducement to adopt. However, fear of latent defects receives much stronger emphasis than the advantage of ability to select manifest characteristics.

There are occasional reminders also of the risks involved in bearing a child.

> "People need to know and learn that you take a risk in any child, whether it's your own or adopted. They also need to know that the way you rear a child and how it turns out is no accident."

A very different anxiety about the child relates, not to fear that he may manifest undesirable traits, but rather to fear of losing him, physically or psychologically, after they have learned to love him. Fewer than one in seven of the respondents say that anxiety about having to tell the child he is adopted may operate as a deterrent, but it is interesting that even this many think so. About half as many think some potential adoptive parents may be deterred by fear that the natural parent might want to reclaim the child later on. "You get very attached to a child and it would be awful to have that kid taken away." These fears also are, for the most part, viewed as groundless or exaggerated, and subject to reduction by adequate public education. However, they are seen as aggravated by the flurry of publicity attending occasional court cases, and possibly by removal of foster children from homes in which they and the foster parents have developed strong mutual attachment.

Adverse attitudes of others

Although some cite desire for social approval as a reason for adopting a child, others see fear of social or family disapproval as

a deterrent to adoption. Relatively few give importance to this element of social pressure, either as incentive or deterrent. Those who see it as a possible deterrent refer to fear of adverse community attitudes or fear of family disapproval. "Some people fear that the child is not going to be accepted by their own parents...." Others fear that "neighbors will talk" or children will tease the adopted child. However, this kind of concern is mentioned relatively seldom and with less emphasis than other deterrents.

LEGAL COMPLICATIONS

Aside from legal fees, (discussed below) relatively few respondents refer to legal complications in the adoption process, and some of these say they pose no great problem. The others are concerned chiefly with termination of parental rights--both the difficulties of establishing a child's legal availability for adoption and the reluctance of many judges to declare the parents unfit. A few complain about the vagaries of judicial decisions in general, including overconcern with matching complexion or religion.

It is clear that some legal complications do exist (some of them serious), but the present inquiry offers insufficient basis to establish clearly either their degree, their nature, or the extent to which they vary with local regulations and practices. As deterrents to adoption, the laws and their application do not appear to be salient in the views of these respondents. Agency people are more likely than others to mention them.

WHY PEOPLE DON'T ADOPT: AGENCY-ORIENTED REASONS

The most numerous and most vehemently stated reasons why potential adoptive parents do not adopt a child concern the policies and practices (actual or imputed) of child-placing agencies. Often the respondents state that the deterring factors are myths rather than realities, or relate to former rather than present practices and policies. Often they recognize also that agency practice varies widely, and that some agencies are still observing rules which other agencies have discarded.[9] Thus, the criticisms represent a mixture of experience and hearsay, of past and present. Nevertheless, it is clear that: (1) some popular

misconceptions or distortions do operate as strong deterrents to adoption; (2) some practices discarded by many or most agencies do still survive among others; (3) some of the sharpest criticisms of present policies and practices come from staff members of social agencies; (4) some of the most appreciative comments about specific agencies come from adoptive parents, referring to the agency that placed their children.

In line with these comments, criticism of agency practices and policies is often coupled with commendation of specific agencies that have introduced modifications or innovations designed to remove or modify the points under criticism.

Public image of "the" social agency

Aside from concern about the specific points detailed below, half of the respondents say that the "public concept" of the social agency--its image--tends to discourage people from applying to adopt a child. (This image tends to blanket all agencies as "the" social agency.)

The social agency image, they say, is widely perceived as forbidding, threatening, rejecting, as "screening out rather than screening in", as demanding perfection in adoptive parents, as "holier than thou", as sitting in judgment with power to give or to withhold.

A few respondents comment that negative attitudes to child-placing agencies are confounded by attitudes to "public assistance". "Confusion between public assistance and child welfare carries a negative connotation of investigation, lack of caring and understanding."

> "To whom is the agency and its staff accountable? Certainly not to clients who are over-evaluated and over-interviewed. Pre-adoptive parents are seen not as clients but as patients, so in effect the staff person says, I know best and I can provide the cure. They aren't seen as customers either, who can pay for services--which they do."

> "People have also heard all kinds of gruesome tales about our looking in the closets, under the bed, and coming to visit at all hours. Isn't this the stereotype of the welfare worker? Yes, and they think we are just like that and do the same thing in adoptions."

Three facets of the generalized image are singled out for special mention: (1) "middle-class bias"; (2) "white orientation"; (3) readiness to reject.

"Middle-class bias". According to over one-third of the respondents, child-placing agencies are generally perceived as by, for, and of the middle class. They are believed to seek only well-educated applicants, with stable, above average incomes and spacious homes, who conform to middle-class patterns in manner and habits. This bias is associated with the criteria agencies are believed to set for accepting an applicant and also with failure to reach out to potential adoptive parents on the lower-middle and lower socioeconomic levels.

> "Customarily, we identify people by social class, but we can note the good salaries in groups like truckers and postal alliances. Our traditional attitude reflects what money means in our economy."

> "We can seek out the many couples of good salaries but non-professional, as in building, steel mills, technical work, government employees not at the professional level. Agencies have not reached these."

> "We feel that the grass roots people with marginal incomes would be good parents. We want to focus on how they manage the money and income they do have as indicative of maturity. There must be many who do this very well. We have more confidence that they would come in to us, if we first went out much more to them."

"White orientation". Mentioned almost as often as middle-class bias, (and often by the same respondents) is the picture of the social agency as "racist"--less by deliberate intent than by built-in biases of which its officials may be unaware. Actually, the class theme and the race theme are interwoven and often merged in the comments of the respondents. Middle-class blacks are frequently grouped with middle-class whites, and "the black community" is often identified with "the working class" or "the poor".

Traditionally, some respondents point out, adoption agencies have been geared to reaching white adoptive parents. They tend to impose middle-class white expectations on a black community that is not mainly middle-class. "No agency has ever really tried to reach black people"; "they haven't really tried to understand the black community".

Some of those who report that black families see adoption agencies as "all white" go on to tell of efforts by specific agencies to eliminate "white bias" and also to modify the picture prevalent in the black communities--efforts described as achieving various degrees of success. Even these respondents, however, do not suggest that enough has been done.

A number of recommendations in the following sections relate to the need for diminishing the basis of the charge that agencies are oriented to a white clientele, and also to diminishing the belief of the black community that this is so.

> "Up until recently, agencies were only interested in placing black children in foster care. They never really thought about placing them in adoptive homes."
>
> "Often a private agency will say it is looking for a home and yet it will put the child in a foster home. It will keep it there rather than releasing it to the public agency, which has an adoptive home. Such children are then called 'hard-to-place'. A hard-to-place child is defined by our local agencies as 'black children over one year of age'."

Some other suggestions are offered by way of counteracting what is several times referred to as "institutional racism", inherent in the structure and staffing of social agencies. A few recommend agencies entirely staffed and administered by blacks, since white social workers are "not used to black people". The attitudes and composition of the boards of voluntary agencies are included as vital in shaping agency policies and practices. "Board involvement is imperative."

> "In general, agency boards have little black representation. This stops the education process in both directions."
>
> "Boards have no mechanism to get feedback from the consumer, i.e., the adoptive parent."
>
> "Agencies do not project themselves as black-concerned. Nothing is built into their program evaluation structure to determine what workers are doing in practice."
>
> "Social workers aren't supposed to be racist. Part of this is that the staff, which might be less racist, is afraid of the board, which controls the purse strings. Because of this, they feel they 'can't move them. The board wouldn't like that.'"
>
> "All child welfare agencies are racist. Hence they need basic change. The composition of the staff, the executives, and the board encourage this racism in a very subtle way...Black people have to run more and more of their institutions for themselves...Only then can recruitment of more black homes really be successful."

> "I think there has to be some exploration of all-black agencies. We have to be in a position to set up our own definitions and criteria. Often this amounts to a totally different definition of family and environment."

Readiness to reject. Partly in response to the widely held "agency image", and partly to their own life histories, some potential adoptive parents are said to be prevented from applying by a general fear of rejection. "There is more fear of rejection among blacks--they feel they have to prove themselves more", "they fear they won't be able to express themselves well in the interview". This is said to be especially true of the "lower class". They want to be "more than prepared" in what they see as "a white situation".

In sum. It is noteworthy that comments relating to agency image and bias are about as likely to be made by whites as by blacks, and are more likely to be made by agency people than by adoptive parents or community representatives. Judging from their comments, many agency people are aware of the current belief that their organizations are oriented toward middle-class and white clients, and of current efforts to counteract the basis and the prevalence of this belief. And many think much more must be done to modify both the facts and the image.

Time, "red tape", and inaccessibility

General comments concerning public image are often linked with and documented by reference to specific practices or policies. Among these, most frequent mention goes to the length of time and the "red tape" involved (or believed to be involved) in completing the adoption process.

Among the respondents who refer specifically to the time period required (about two out of five), the consensus is that the process could be streamlined but that even now it is probably not as excessive as is generally believed. "They think it takes forever." Several mention with approval that at least some agencies are speeding up the process. Although a very few remark that independent adoptions are quicker and therefore impatient applicants may turn to them, mention of this recourse is very slight.

The slowness of the procedures, according to some, combines with the picture of endless forms to be filled out to "put off" potential black applicants.

> "I know that there is some red tape involved....Maybe you ought to take a look at that to see if that red tape is going to keep a lot of people from adopting kids, because our folks won't spend a whole lot of effort trying to work their way through that, they would just as soon quit."

"Man, look at all the families and people that we have who could adopt. There are a number of people who could really take care of kids, but you got to go through that trip with the adoption agency trying to get them to allow you to adopt."

"In one agency a client could have, by chance, a harrowing experience and if he went to another, a beautiful experience. A lot of people must get stuck on the bureaucracy bit."

"The red tape people expect really turns them off. You hear hearsay, such as there's a lot of red tape; you have to be the parents of the year in order to get a child....I'll have to say this. I went through less for this adoption than for a lot of other things."

Some refer to special agency efforts to reduce the waiting period for black applicants, and feelings are mixed about this manifestation of a "double standard". On the one hand, it is viewed as a realistic accommodation to the urgency of the need and, on the other hand, it is regretted as suggesting less concern for the future well-being of black than of white babies.

"The agency seemed not to be able to stick to a standard where a black child was involved. I know it is hard to place black children, but should just <u>any</u> home be accepted?"

"We offer a number of families, particularly the black, financial assistance, but that is discrimination in reverse because a number of other kinds of families really need the financial assistance as well."

A few agency people point out that limitations of clerical and professional staff slow down the pace of completing an adoption. One agency director, however, reported that speeding up the adoption process had saved his agency many thousands of dollars.

"Ordinarily blacks are given priority and are supposed to be seen immediately. White couples are usually seen in groups and have to wait longer for appointments because the need for adoption is greatest with black children. Now the black people have to be seen in groups. It is difficult to do this during the day. A good percentage are not followed through because there just isn't enough time."

Location and hours. The adoption process is complicated, some say, by the difficulty of keeping appointments during the working day, often at inconvenient locations. Interestingly enough, those who mention problems of time and place (about one in four) are more likely to do so by way of approving the flexible time schedules introduced by a number of agencies than by criticizing traditional appointment patterns. Examples are cited of neighborhood centers and of evening hours for working people. It is interesting also--though not surprising--that agency members are the ones most likely to mention the problems of time and place.

"Throughout the interview Mr. R. seemed to express in various ways that recruiting of black families practically takes care of itself, if an agency locates itself in the community where the need is greatest. A community-oriented agency can easily make formal and informal contacts with its potential clientele."

"It is much too early to speculate about the degree of effectiveness of the district office. Both negative and positive feelings have been expressed by our local advisors. For some, opening a district in the black community is a symbol of racism, for others it means a demonstration of an intent to give service."

"Interviews may be held in the local or main office, as convenient. Black applicants usually choose the local office--if not because of identification, certainly for convenience of locale and time (many are employed)."

Rigidity. Agency rigidity is referred to almost as often as problems of time and place. For the most part such references are general, accusing agencies of inflexibility, suggesting that they must "rethink and re-evaluate what they've been doing in the past", "get rid of rules that don't apply any more", that they are "so steeped in tradition they're too inflexible to meet present needs".

A good many, however, say the agencies are becoming less rigid, more flexible, more innovative than they have been in the past. These see the problems as lying partly in "image lag"--failure of the agency image to keep step with modifications in rules and procedures--but partly in the failure of some agencies to make appropriate modifications.

> "Certain procedures could be changed. I've never heard of such as these elsewhere. We'll never place a child until a certified copy of a birth certificate reaches us. Other agencies will accept a line by line statement from a hospital. It takes up to six months to get this, so a child will have to go into a foster home until this is received. This is expensive. Of course the older a child gets, the harder he is to place....I looked into this--this is a procedure which hasn't been changed."

> "A number of these children are children who could be placed but the rigidity of the agency rules often prevents a considerable number of children from being adopted. I feel that in these kinds of circumstances, the agency is at fault and it really shows how they feel about the kids, particularly black kids."

Criteria for adoptive parenthood

It has been reported that low income deters many people from seeking an extra mouth to feed. Agency requirements with regard to income and housing are seen as further deterrents by a substantial minority of the respondents (about one-third). There should be less emphasis on externals, in the view of these critics. What matters most, they say, is that adoptive parents should love children and be able to give them firm guidance. Some see middle-class bias in the alleged agency emphasis on income and housing facilities.

> "It's not income that counts, but how well they manage it."

> "Agencies should look for love and not for finances."

> "...the agency makes you feel like you got to move up and dress fine rather than just being able to love and to help a child be well adjusted and allow the child to grow."

> "Adoption agencies have in part created their own problems. They frightened hopeful applicants away with specific middle-class requirements for housing and income. Now they need eager, interested adoption workers with realistic views of people and society as it functions today."

On the whole, those who discuss "external" requirements such as money and housing, lean to the opinion that adoptive parents should be able to support their families without assistance. "Love is good for a child but not enough." Nevertheless, many approve of helping potential adoptive parents with financial supplements if necessary--a point discussed below in connection with subsidized adoptions.

Evidences that agency practice is in flux appear once more in occasional comments that income requirements are less stringent than formerly, that their income criteria were once rigid but have been relaxed. And on this point, as on a good many others, a few urge that agencies let the public know their requirements are less demanding than is generally assumed.

The requirement that an adoptive mother should stop working is viewed as a serious deterrent for many black families. Comments on this point divide between objections to the requirement and statements that it has been modified or eliminated by some agencies, but that this relaxation of the rule is not generally known. [10]

> "The problem was that the adoption agency wanted the wife to stop work, but the agency later changed and said that the wife didn't have to, but by that time, the husband was reluctant to actually go through with the process of adoption."

Fees

Included in the cluster of practices relating to economic facts and assumptions is the subject of agency fees, referred to by about one-fourth of the respondents. Adoptive parents and community representatives tend to favor eliminating fees, occasionally adding that, after all, adoptive parents are rendering a service and shouldn't have to pay for it. "When people feel they're doing the community a service by adopting, fees make no sense to them." Some others accept the idea of a fee, but stipulate that it should be lower than it is or flexible, "on a sliding scale".

A few agency members say that fees are less high than is often assumed, or that they are lowered when "a person is trying to get ahead, or there are other people being supported", and that the public should be told about this. However, those who mention fees at all tend to disapprove of the amount charged or of charging any fee at all. And, many of the comments reflect repugnance at the idea that one should pay for getting a child. "They say it's like buying a baby."

> "Black families aren't going to pay for adopting no baby."
>
> "It's just like going out and buying a pair of shoes! Maybe they have a reason but I don't really know what the purpose of the fee is. I do realize that they have employees they have to pay."
>
> "Fees may to some applicants give value to the adoption. Where applied, it should be on a sliding scale, or contributions should be invited."

One agency executive raises a problem not faced by adoptive parents or community representatives. "Adoption fees are an important source of income for the agency. The Community Fund expects participants to raise part of their budget through their own efforts. I don't think the agency can eliminate fees." The implicit answer of others appears to be that the community--that is, the Government--rather than the adoptive parents, should bear this burden. The continuing problem of financing agency programs and innovations is brought up in a number of other connections, usually by agency people.

Lawyers' fees. Related to criticisms of agency fees and also to economic limitations--though far less frequent than either--is the subject of lawyers' fees. A few say the lawyer's fee should be eliminated entirely, and the cost carried by the agency or the State. Others comment that some lawyers adjust the fee to suit the client's economic situation or that applicants can apply for legal aid if necessary. One or two suggest that the agency should provide lawyers instead of requiring the applicant to pay both an agency and a lawyer's fee. Other suggestions are a fixed, moderate lawyer's fee, or that a group of lawyers should undertake to handle the legal complexities for a minimum charge.

Psychological probing

The intensiveness of the study that precedes acceptance of an applicant is reported as a deterrent by over half of the respondents. And,

although adoptive parents are, on the whole, less critical than other respondents concerning this point, they are as likely as agency members to comment adversely--and a good deal more likely than community representatives--even though they may add that they have no complaint concerning their own experience.

That reluctance to undergo intensive "psychological probing" may be a deterrent is not necessarily viewed as demonstrating that a certain amount of study is unnecessary. The prevailing view is rather that the amount of psychological study is often excessive and that, in any case, it is incompatible with the life style and tolerance of many potential adoptive parents. It is seen as "too nosey", and even as "humiliating".

An adoptive parent, who had "nothing but praise" for his agency experience, said he did feel that too many "personal and unnecessary" questions were asked, although they were handled in a "tactful manner". He thought there might have been fewer interviews with the same result.

To some extent, the respondents advise toning down the number and the intensity of the study interviews. To some extent, they advise greater efforts to make clear the purpose of the "probing". And, to some extent, they advocate that agencies should adapt their own assumptions and patterns to those of adoptive applicants who do not share the middle-class acceptance of discussing their private lives, thoughts, and feelings with others--especially with others who represent an orientation and an authority perceived as alien.

> "Interviewing techniques are often very middle-class. For example, asking a person how they feel about something is very middle-class. Many people aren't used to discussing their feelings."
>
> "For some reason I don't like the idea of sitting across the table like you're on the witness stand. It's like judge and jury. I don't see why they can't visit the home first. When you sit at the desk and they say 'tell me something about yourself and why you want to adopt a child' you feel doomed before you start."
>
> "The procedure might turn someone off, for example, asking about how much money you have in the bank. They ask a lot of questions that can be annoying, especially when you see the lady jotting down the answers."

"Mrs. F. critized agencies' lengthy probe into sex life of applicants and lengthy focus on background. Much of the concentration seems irrelevant to the applicant."

A few respondents defend the necessity to "screen applicants carefully so 'undesirables' will not be accepted", and to "bring out motives about adoption and feelings about their marriage". "I'm not among those who feel a child should be placed with anyone. That's what happens with birth." For the most part, however, the emphasis is on the need to reduce the amount of psychological study to the essential minimum and to develop more effective ways of making that minimum acceptable.

Fertility investigations. Inquiry into the existence and basis of infertility, although not strictly psychological, is associated with "the probing psychological thing" and is said to arouse especial anxiety and distaste. It is seen as particularly threatening to men, and is referred to explicitly by several who did not imply that black men are more sensitive than whites on this point. Although relatively few (about one in seven) singled out fertility examinations as a deterrent, no respondent explicitly defended them. On the contrary, the consensus is that this aspect of the inquiry is "stupid" and should be eliminated. The feeling against efforts to discover if a couple is sterile is reinforced by a frequently expressed belief that it is a good thing for a family to include both natural and adoptive children, and an occasional opinion that sometimes adopting a child helps a woman to conceive and bear a natural child. [11]

Especially unfortunate, according to a few respondents, are questions about causes of childlessness introduced into the initial telephone inquiry--a sure method, they say, of losing the applicant.

Several examples are cited of agencies that have eased or eliminated fertility investigations, with favorable results.[12] Comments about fertility examinations come primarily from agency people and adoptive parents, and chiefly from the locality in which this kind of investigation is still most frequently included.

"Our agency always prefers to place children where parents can't have their own. I think this is stupid."

"She remembered that, in both telephone contacts, the agency workers had asked about fertility. She found this annoying."

"We ask them on the phone what kind of a child they want. A few years back we asked about fertility. We deleted that as too personal. We do ask them but do it later on and de-emphasize this question. Some agencies go into this and ask a couple to go to a doctor about their fertility."

Matching

Efforts to match the characteristics of a child to those of the adoptive parents appear sometimes as deterrents to adoption and sometimes as incentives. This is the point on which evidence is most ambiguous, and on which there seems the most individual ambivalence. No consensus emerges about whether agencies should or should not try to match, nor about how much or how effectively they do try.

Less than one-third of the respondents volunteer comments on this point, and the opinions they express are often mixed. Some say that agencies are doing a good job on matching, others that they put too much stress on it, still others that any effort at matching is a mistake and that many agencies are wisely slackening their attempts to achieve a "perfect match".

Some speak of matching in terms of religion or intellectual potential, but a good many more talk about hair and skin color. One or two say that applicants still want "good" hair and light skin, while a few others think that applicants are less concerned with these characteristics than formerly, "especially the younger couples". A few say growing recognition that "black is beautiful" has reduced the desire for a light child, while one or two others suggest that adoptive parents "know they shouldn't care but really do".

Thus, the impression gleaned from review of comments about matching is one of ambivalence and flux. There is a balance of approval and disapproval concerning agency practice--and either approval or disapproval may be related to how good a job is being done with matching, to reduced agency emphasis on it, or to agencies helping adoptive applicants become more flexible with regard to it. It seems clear that agency practices with regard to matching are in the process of changing, as are the attitudes of applicants and potential applicants. Both agencies and applicants are less clearcut and less unanimous than formerly in the view that vigourous efforts at matching are a sine qua non of adoption placement.[13] Beyond this, the main conclusion offered by these interviews is that individual variations take precedence over formulated principles.

"Many families look like a rainbow. You see that in many black families. You see it in white families. As people become more aware of pride in being black, black people will favor less those who are closest to being white. I hear more parents verbalizing that they want their unborn children to be black in skin color."

"Agencies are breaking down this matching bit. The better social workers are against matching. There exists now an attitude among workers that parents' willingness to care for a child, any child, is more important than their specifications of what sort of child they want and how much a child can resemble them before they will take a child."

"The identity revolution has changed the attitude of prospective black adopters. Whereas, once, the complexion of a child was so very important, that is, an emphasis on lightness, now the black child is sought."

"Younger couples now applying are accepting younger babies, and have less anxiety about skin color, hair, and 'I.Q. tests'. These characteristics were previously related to acceptance in the community's eyes, and the ability of the child to make it in a hostile world. Younger couples of today are more aggressive in the community and more secure."

Anxious applicants

From initial application to final completion, adopting a child is generally seen as a tense and anxious process. It is within an agency's power, according to about one-fourth of the respondents, to allay the anxiety by explaining the procedures to be followed and the reasons for them, by providing feedback where appropriate, by maintaining contact--in general, by giving as much reassurance as possible. Although the individual social worker can do much to augment or diminish the difficulties of the applicants during the investigation and placement period, agency policy is seen as setting the tone and the objectives of the procedures.

Agency people who discuss the need for studied effort to cope with applicants' anxieties are likely to criticize inadequate steps in this direction. Adoptive parents, on the other hand, divide between general criticism and appreciation of the effectiveness with which certain social workers helped to minimize their own tension and anxiety during the adoption process. Community representatives, who for the most part have not experienced either the giving or the receiving end of an

adoption placement, very rarely comment on the need to cope with applicant anxieties.

> "They come in and tell us that they have heard that we have been advertising for homes, they want to have a child, and people in the neighborhood can attest to what good parents they would be. Then we give them the third degree. There is a lot of anxiety involved. It seems to me that we ought to be trying to alleviate anxiety rather than building in more."
>
> "Half the problem is the agency's image. The other half is the agency's failure to appreciate the client's anxiety about his application. Procedures should be made understandable to the client. The maturity and skill of the worker is paramount, as she is the one who decides on the applicant."
>
> "One of the helpful techniques that the agency used with them was that, after the adoption process began, they got several couples together to share their experiences and their information and Mrs. L. said she found it extremely helpful. Mr. L. said he didn't really feel that impressed by it but it was better than just trying to go into adoption by yourself."

Social workers

The practices and policies of agencies concerned with adoption are, for the most part, perceived by adoptive applicants through the individual social workers with whom they have contact. More than half of the respondents offer comments about social workers, as individuals or in general.

Since a number of the comments relate to the social worker's "image", it is important to differentiate those who speak on the basis of their own experience from those who speak of prevailing impressions. Analysis shows, however, that almost all of those who talk about social workers--as distinct from agency policies and practices--indicate that they speak from experience. Once again, the adoptive parents are the ones most likely to make favorable comments. The agency people and community representatives--despite occasional exceptions--are more likely to be critical, either of individual social workers or of social workers in general.

The adoptive parents, on the whole, testify that they found the requisite skills and understanding in the social workers with whom they

dealt. Whether this means that the recommended qualities and qualifications are more generally present than other respondents assumed, that the adoptive parents interviewed were those who had favorable experiences, or that applicants who fail to find requisite skill and understanding do not complete an agency adoption, cannot be determined from these interviews. Some support for the second speculation lies in the fact that all the adoptive parents interviewed are in a sense "satisfied customers", since almost all of them received a child from an agency, and all are well pleased with the outcome of their contact.

That comments from agency people tend, on the whole, to be more critical than those of other respondents could result from their wide experience with many levels of practice, a professional pride in maintaining high standards, and an interest in removing deterrents rather than in emphasizing the extent to which high standards are met by many social workers.

Altogether, critical comments outnumber the favorable ones, as is to be expected in discussions focused on ways of overcoming obstacles to adoption. The most frequent criticisms involve generalized attitudes of social workers, referred to by slightly over one in five. A number of comments, however, are neither critical nor favorable, but rather point to the prerequisites of the social worker's role--the need for warmth, understanding, familiarity with community resources, ability to conduct "interviews that are not interrogations", and "ability to listen and really hear what people are saying". Other desiderata are ability to "assess behavior beyond a superficial level", to "sort out the meaning of various clues", to be calm, allay anxiety, put applicants at ease, and to "help them decide what kind of child they really want".

> "People have the feeling that the workers are just indiscriminately going to come to the house and try to dig up dirt and stuff about them instead of really trying to help them get the adoption through."

> "They have been instrumental in recruiting two adoptive families. One, however, did not proceed with the agency because the worker with whom they spoke 'completely turned them off'."

> "She felt that there should be two types of adoption worker--the investigator and the information person. She clarified this by saying that there should be a specially trained person who would make the home visits and conduct certain interviews. There should be another worker trained just to answer questions and dispense information."

"She said that so much depends on the worker--some of them have no business in the field of adoptions at all. She criticized the agency saying, 'The agency never studied the effect of the worker's relationship to the families or effect upon the families.'"

"Social workers really do have all sorts of ideas about rescuing these children from their poor parents and putting them into better homes that are foster homes. I feel very strongly about this."

Race and class bias. General criticisms occasionally state or imply the lack of attributes essential to the social worker's role, or "negative" and "judgmental" attitudes toward adoptive applicants. More often, however, they impute race or class bias on the part of social workers, or lack of ease on the part of black clients.

Respondents who impute racial bias or communication problems sometimes suggest that social workers dealing with black adoptive applicants should themselves be black, a recommendation made by less than one in five of the respondents. At least as frequent, however, are statements that the race of the social worker is far less important than skill, human understanding, and ability to communicate well with different kinds of people.

Class bias is imputed somewhat less often than "racism", and occasionally is directed against black social workers: social workers "fail to recognize the strengths in poor families"; middle-class blacks succeed no better with working-class blacks than whites do. Although such comments about black social workers are relatively few, they clearly relate to the more frequent complaints, already noted, about the middle-class bias of adoption agencies. They relate also to the merging and possible confusion of complaints about race bias and class bias. Points made to illustrate "racism" in agency orientation and the attitudes of social workers often involve social class differences as well as color differences. The point is not new, but generally fails to achieve due recognition. [14]

Taken all together, the comments about social workers show opinions dividing between a preference for black workers with black applicants and belief that individual competence and human response are more important than skin color, with social class bias and communication blocks less often specified but frequently present by implication. And, despite the emphasis on male sensitivity in relation to adoption, only two respondents suggest that there might be an advantage in having male social workers for consultation with men who are considering adoption.

"This racism is not only in white people, but in middle-class blacks."

"Black social workers can really be helpful if they know where they are coming from, if they understand themselves, but we really need to push people to make certain that the black social workers and people get hired. But they need to be pushed so that they can know to pick families well and know how to deal with the brothers and sisters who are interested in doing some serious adopting because they use that middle-class frame of reference. And I don't know man, you know, that middle-class reference creates more problems for us than we really can solve."

"A middle-class family could do just as well with a middle-class white worker, particularly if there is an intellectual equality...A number of black families in working with black workers will consider the worker to be lower class and that might really interfere with the process, particularly where the worker is not as well educated, or there will be some talking down from some of the more professional type people who would be available to adopt. Also, there are many black workers who do not want to work with black families. They say that one of the problems is that blacks do the detail work slower and it takes longer to get the adoption process completed because blacks won't complete all the forms that are necessary or return the confidential financial statement or get...some of the documents that are needed."

"Because of a lack of knowledge of language patterns and styles in the black community, I think that whites often completely misinterpret feelings that blacks express. They hear one thing and think it means something else. I think that many times a faulty interpretation is made of the so-called inability of blacks to get on a 'feeling level' as though this was a personal defect rather than seeing it as the reluctance of blacks to express their feelings to a white person that they don't know."

"Even the black social workers in this agency seem to look to white people!"

"I had to work with a social worker who was white and there was no problem with them, they are nice. They don't spend their time questioning the kids, and sometimes I even get worried because they spend so little time worrying or concerning themselves with how we really are taking care and providing for the children."

"Status is attached to workers being in adoptions. It assumes that you have your MSW, which gives you some status in the field. But most of the studies and the analyzing of adoptive homes has been white status instead of black."

"They really should ask the black couple if they would really prefer to talk to a black worker so that they can really be a bit more relaxed, or if they really feel that they could work with most any kind of worker."

Those who are concerned about the attitudes of social workers (black or white) tend to favor work with agency staff in recognizing and overcoming problems of attitude and communication. The director of an unusually successful project, conducted by a voluntary agency, underlines the importance of preliminary work with agency staff, before launching such an effort. She describes a "Workshop on Race", including two six-hour sessions, a week apart, which were aimed at "self-examination of attitudes toward race, and the effects of these attitudes on practice". The workshop was supplemented by private interviewing of staff members, and the two activities are described as resulting in "more worker self-awareness and comfort". Several other agency people recommend similar staff discussions and explorations. "Most staffs could benefit from this experience." They point out that, for many social workers, the current approach to adoption represents a considerable change, requiring a new or modified orientation and an opportunity to explore and express their own confusions, resistances, uncertainties, and ambivalences. "You can't deal with your own feelings if you don't recognize that they exist."

ENLARGING THE TARGET GROUP

Implicit and explicit in many of the points already reviewed is the need to reach beyond the groups who now comprise the great majority of adoptive parents and who, at least until recently, have been the main targets of efforts to increase the number of adoptive homes. These groups, the respondents point out again and again, are for the most part middle- or upper-income white couples--usually childless people under forty and over twenty-five.

In order to meet the need, or to come much nearer meeting it, the strong consensus favors including other kinds of people, who have been less likely to give serious thought to adopting a child and have not, as a rule, been thought about as potential adoptive parents.

Respondents were asked about their views on some kinds of adoptive placements that do not present the traditional picture: with only one parent; with parents different from the child in racial background; with older parents; with subsidy to the adoptive parents; and with foster parents.

Except for "trans-racial" adoptions, the opinions concerning these kinds of placements show two prevailing characteristics: approval is much more frequent than outright disapproval; approval is often linked with qualifications, stipulations, and provisos. Among the frequent provisos are that, in the specified type of adoption, the individual characteristics of the adoptive parents and the child must be given special study and attention, and that follow-up study and counsel are especially necessary.

A recurrent comment with regard to these special types of placement is that, whatever its disadvantages, the one under consideration is better than the probable alternative of keeping a child in unstable foster care or in an institution, with no real home of his own. Striking also is the consistency with which the reasons a few give for opposing a special type of placement appear more often as qualifications to approval, or as a basis for suspending a final judgment either for or against it.

The respondents do not, of course, suggest ruling out the kinds of people traditionally assumed to be candidates for adoptive parenthood. But they do very strongly urge broadening the target group.

One-parent adoptions

Most of the respondents discuss single-parent adoptions, and almost none expresses outright disapproval. Some, however, seeing a balance between advantages and disadvantages, offer mixed or neutral opinions. Outright approval (by a little over two-thirds of the respondents) varies from unqualified enthusiasm to "only-if" conditions and limitations.

Approval is repeatedly linked with stipulations that the age and sex of the child must be appropriate. Definitions of "appropriate" vary somewhat, but lean toward belief that the child should have passed infancy and that probably the same sex is preferable to a cross-sex placement. Problems concerning homosexuality are rarely mentioned, but may be implicit in the frequent injunction or implication that the motivation and personal makeup of one-parent applicants call for especially careful study.

One-parent mothers. For the most part, single-parent adoptions are

seen as adoption by a woman, and it is mainly these that evoke unqualified enthusiasm. "One of the best things we have going", exclaims a community representative. An agency member describes it not as a second choice, but as "a desirable alternative".

As usual, some reasons for qualifying approval represent some of the reasons for suspending definite judgment. The most frequent ones relate to the kind of unmarried woman who applies to adopt a child, and her ability to provide a really good home. She is described by the unqualified approvers as likely to be mature, responsible, emotionally stable, economically adequate, able to provide male models and companions through her extended family or social circle. The more qualified approval is often made contingent on these same characteristics.

Approval, whether qualified or unqualified, is often coupled with the view that "one parent is better than none", and that to encourage single-parent adoptions would greatly increase the number of available adoptive homes.[15]

The large number of one-parent natural homes is seen as a reason for favoring adoption by women who have never married or are now divorced or widowed. "Many are doing a good job of raising children." There is an occasional comment that a happy, harmonious one-parent home can be far better for a child than a two-parent home torn by parental friction.[16]

The possibility that a single parent might marry after adopting a child receives scant and highly diverse comment. One or two cite instances where single-parent adoption has ultimately led to marriage, and speculate that such a marriage may have better than average chances of success "because the child is there and the situation is known." On the other hand, one or two fear that adoption might prevent marriage, or the adoptive mother might marry someone who didn't like the child.

The relatively few who express misgivings about adoptions by "unattached" women give reasons similar to the provisos of some who favor them. For example, they warn against the possible motivations of one-parent applicants. They may just be lonely and want company, they may be impelled by their own need rather than by interest in and ability to care for a child.

That the absence of a father in the home is seen by a good many as a great disadvantage is evident in the comments of those who see a one-parent home as a second-best choice, acceptable only if a two-parent home is unavailable. Yet this disadvantage is seldom viewed as crucial. It receives little explicit mention--less than the belief that it is more advantageous than some alternatives.

A concern expressed by only a few is that it would be difficult to explain to a child why he was taken from an unmarried mother and given to another unattached mother; or that placing a child in a one-parent home may be unfair to an unmarried mother who has given up her child so that he may have two parents.

> "So sensible; should have been doing it all along. We know there are thousands of normally occurring single-parent families in the population."
>
> "In today's society, the many natural single parents, divorced, or widowed, make the adoptive single parent less conspicuous and less sensitive to his position. Out of approximately 100 adoptive parents, our agency has 16 to 18 singles. These parents are remarkably like the couples we see."
>
> "A lot of kids come from one-parent homes, and do fine...At least they got a home, they got somebody they can count on and somebody who is taking care of them; so I can imagine that there is a lot of single people out here who really could do adoptions."
>
> "Our agency has placed ten babies, all black, with single women adopters. We've been very pleased with these applicants, who are very special women in terms of strength, commitment and integrity. Two of the women are now married and credit the adoption as an influential factor. The single-parent adoption is an excellent means of providing a stable and loving home for a child."
>
> "I think single-parent adoptions are great. The child is provided with love, a home, and at least one caring parent. There is also provision in this method for black identity, as well as male and female identification, because either parent adopting would certainly have relatives, neighbors, and friends of the opposite sex."
>
> "Often, the single parent could provide a more stable and emotionally secure environment than a two-parent family where marital and personality conflicts caused friction."
>
> "It would certainly be better to use them than leaving the children in foster homes."

One-parent fathers. Relatively few (about one in six) include unattached men in their consideration of single-parent homes and, for the most part, even these give a good deal more attention to one-parent mothers. Explicit approval, again, is far more frequent than disapproval--in fact, only two respondents definitely disapprove, while three have mixed feelings.

Although approval far outweighs disapproval, unqualified approval is much less frequent than in connection with single-parent mothers. The qualifications and conditions are similar for both kinds of one-parent placements: that there be appropriate members of the other sex in contact with the child, either through the extended family or the social group; that the age and sex of the child be appropriate; that the individual be healthy, emotionally stable, financially secure, have inner strength and capacity to give.

The few who express mixed opinions indicate that such placements should not be ruled out, but should be accepted only after all elements have been carefully weighed and after possibilities for two-parent placements have been exhausted.

The chief stated objection is that women are competent and experienced at playing a dual parental role, but a man would find it difficult to be both mother and father to a child.

> "There are ways to provide male identity, but they still haven't found a way to replace a mother."
>
> "I guess adoption by single males would work, but it is much more common for the woman to have to play the male and female roles than for the male to play the female role. I would be inclined to see a man adopt males. I just can't see a man playing the mother role with infant girls."

Trans-racial adoptions

No subject evokes stronger feelings among these respondents than "trans-racial" or "cross-racial" adoptions. [17] Opinions divide rather evenly between approving, disapproving, and viewing them with mixed emotions. Those who approve are somewhat more numerous than either those who disapprove or those who make no definite judgment. However, the feelings expressed by those who disapprove are far more intense than in either of the other two categories.

Those who speak from direct experience or observation (usually agency people or adoptive parents) come out two to one in favor of

trans-racial adoptions. Those who base their views on hearsay or on principle--chiefly the community representatives--are a little more likely to oppose than to favor them. Black respondents divide evenly for and against this kind of placement, while whites are a little more likely to favor than to oppose it. Yet the whites who do oppose it resemble the blacks in the intensity of feeling and the kinds of reasons given.

Those who approve sometimes indicate that they are talking about placing children of mixed (black/white) parentage with white parents. [18] "The child is part white so the responsibility should be shared." Some, however, make it clear that they would include the darkest children. The main reasons for favoring trans-racial adoptions are: that there are not enough black adoptive homes available, that these adoptions are better than available alternatives, and that white couples who want to adopt black children are likely to have good potential for parenthood. They are characterized as idealistic, independent, thoughtful, flexible, and as likely to have given careful thought to the risks and problems involved. Less often it is remarked that white families who choose to adopt black children are apt to be able to offer educational, social, and economic advantages. One or two think that this kind of adoption can help to improve race relations; and one or two think that already color difference is less important than formerly.

Because this is the most controversial point covered, an unusual number of comments about it are included.

> "It has, for the most part, worked out very well. The large majority of people who come in thinking of this kind of adoption have thought through this very carefully. Most people thinking about adopting transracially have something special about them. They aren't just out in support of any cause. They are very articulate about this venture and they see many sides to their decision. They know they'll have problems, but they have the strength to come to grips with them. They are not people who easily give answers on how they'll solve these problems in ten years or so. We feel they will be able to handle them by the time they get there. We feel they will be able to contribute to the strength of the children when they face such problems."

> "I don't personally have any hang-ups about the identity crisis going on in the black community and even though I'm black I think some white couples have been much better applicants than some black couples."

"Some families have integrated the black adopted children with natural children. Some have returned for their second, believing thereby to provide additional identification for each other."

"After all, honey, this is where we're at now. You see so many mixed couples now--black men with white women--white men with black women. What difference does it make? Many black people have been passing all of their lives. If you are really fair, who could tell what you were? I don't think anyone would really be concerned if they saw a white couple with a black baby. The important thing is if they love the child and take good care of it."

"More and more inter-racial couples are 'making it' because it has become an accepted thing socially, so why not the black child in a white family? In a while we are all going to be bi-racial. Just won't be able to tell what one is."

"We are beyond the time when people will recoil and flee at the mention of cross-racial adoption. Today people like to be thought of as open-minded even when they don't practice it. There is a certain amount of appeal in being considered in step with revolutionary times."

"I've worked for protective services and it's really better for a child to have a good family rather than a neglectful or abusing family just because we need to keep him in one particular race."

"I've talked about this to about three different adoptive parents who adopted black children. They (these white parents) face problems, yes. The children are still young. I don't think there will be any more real problems than any adopted child has about his identity and who his or her parents were. The neighbors will talk about the nigger-lovers. They (white parents) will have to help their child face this and accept this."

"We don't want our black sons to be ill-informed about black people. We want them to be proud of their heritage. It's a bit of a struggle for us....we get plenty of stares. We are used to stares. We knew we would get them. We want people to think that families depend on one another, not on the color of their skin. This is an amazing experience."

"We are test cases because there are so few like us. We feel we must make ourselves qualified."

"Rearing a child, black or white, will turn out some good and some bad."

"She was not opposed to the transracial placement but felt that in the best-intentioned white families, there were inherent problems of attitude and guilt. Of any method, she would prefer this least."

"If a child is of mixed racial background I can see some real advantages in placing him with a white couple, but I don't think too much of placing black children with white couples."

Leading all reasons for opposing trans-racial adoptions is the problem of identity, mentioned by about one-third of all the respondents, including some who give mixed or qualified opinions. "White families could never provide a black experience for a black child. They could never adequately help a child with his black identity and pride in his heritage." (A recurrent phrase is "White families could never provide ...") Concern is felt especially about the period of adolescence for such a child.

Even if the immediate family experiences no problems, it is pointed out, the child may suffer from negative attitudes of relatives, neighbors, school children and teachers, the general community. "He will never feel really accepted."

On the whole, reasons for opposition relate to race relations in the society. "Black families build in mechanisms to handle living in a racist society. White families could not provide these for a black child." However, a scornful fraction (about one in eight) raise questions about the "real" motivation of white parents who adopt a black child--occasionally adding that any child not light enough to "pass" is classified as black. These trans-racial parents, they say, are impelled either by social guilt or by an image of themselves as model liberals, deserving of praise and esteem for their noble act. Or they are "idealistic eggheads with ego problems", cherishing middle-class "rescue fantasies--rescue these children from horrible foster homes or even horrible parents". Two mention two black social workers' organizations that have "taken a stand against cross-racial adoptions as a form of emotional genocide". One or two others comment that when white children are placed in black families it may be time to place black children in white ones.

"I just really feel they cannot prepare black children in the way black parents can for the kind of world they will have to live in. You won't talk to many other white social workers or even black ones in this agency who will say they feel this way."

"Yeh, white folks can give material things like guarantee college, but the youngster would have lost his rightful spot in the community in dealing with his people, so that kind of, aw man, let's don't even talk about it."

"Black people belong with their own. We are having enough trouble getting ourselves together, and this struggle would be completely foreign to whites."

"I see absolutely no advantages in this kind of placement. I would rather see a black child remain in a foster home or institution. At least there he would be exposed to black life styles. Identity is all-important, and no white family can provide this for a black child."

"I am absolutely against multi-racial adoptions. It also may teach the child to resent being black as he grows older. He has to live in an all-white community, where there are no black kids, and see the strain of people trying to make things nice. The school treats and acts as if black kids are different and the prejudice--oh, the prejudice, there is just no escaping it. You have a problem with party invites, and being social in the community. The older the child gets, the worse the problem gets."

"It is mostly middle-class and upper-class people who are interested in interracial adoptions. Agencies are willing to find homes, any homes for children when they're free for adoption....People who adopt interracially are still getting the praise of both the black and white community, even praise as saviours of the black community!"

"I can imagine arguments at a later point, and someone slipping up and calling the child nigger. You should stick with your own color. Under no circumstances should a child be placed across racial lines."

"Society will push them out, the family won't necessarily, but society will. I could see it if one of the parents is of the same race as the adopted kids."

"I don't go along with that, that parents can adjust to adopting youngsters, but what about the schools and the neighborhood? Any place they go, the kids think of themselves as white and the family thinks of the kids as being like white kids and they can't talk out their problems."

"When you talk with them, they say everything is happy, or fine and lovely, but they don't know what the child is thinking and they don't know what kind of problems he's facing because they are so busy taking care of their own needs."

"As we live in a white society, it would be more acceptable for a white child to go into a black home. The same problems of acceptance and identity would not exist."

"Whites can take children of other groups but these groups are not allowed to take whites. Only last year there was a case here in which a Negro family had taken in a white child and the child wanted to stay with the family but the court made the family give the child up. Something's wrong when it can't work both ways."

"The thing that really surprises me is that the placement of black children with white families apparently has gone on with no consideration of the thinking in the black community."

Strong opposition is occasionally coupled with the charge that, instead of really trying to find black adoptive homes, the agencies are "going all-out to find white homes for them". The Director of one child-placing agency gives some support to the claim by saying that she is only now beginning to understand there might be some legitimate complaint about placement in white homes if agencies are not trying to recruit black ones; and adding, as if with thoughtful recognition of a new idea, that of course her own agency had been guilty of this, having made no attempt at recruiting or outreach for black parents in the last two years.

"Trans-racial adoption should be the last and final resort. No matter how hard they might seem to have tried, no agency has made a concerted effort to reach black people who could adopt all these available children."

"With regard to the search for 'good' homes, we've preferred trans-racial adoptions even to making the all out search for 'good' black homes or even questionable black homes, which in the long run could work out very well. In other words, we've been more concerned with the physical aspects of the home than with other standards, such as what else a parent can give them."

"We do no recruiting of white families either, but allow the adoptive parent group to do it for us."

Those with qualified or uncertain views occasionally say that a trans-racial adoption should be considered only if no other alternative exists except an institution. Some point out that it is still too early to know how black children will fare after ten years as part of a white family. Others say it depends on the individuals involved and that such adoptions require the most careful study and evaluation before a placement is made; or that only mixed-race children should be placed in white homes. Not only the adoptive applicants must be considered, but also the neighborhood, the climate of the community, and the attitudes of the extended family.

"I hope some school, agency, or the Office of Child Development will have a follow-up study of cross-racial adoptions on a large sampling of four or five year olds. At that time the child will be moving out into the community independently of his parents. It will be an anxious time for the parents and they will need support."

For the most part, trans-racial adoption is discussed in the context of the present, with a time span stretching no further than the child's adolescence or young adulthood. A few take a longer view, but come out with differing conclusions. As time goes on, one predicts, race will be less important, but while we are "in an early phase of the Black Revolution" life could be uncomfortable for "white families with black kids." Another comment, "it's scarey. We don't know which way the society is going, and if it becomes very polarized--as quite a few have predicted--these children will be in a really difficult position. If we stay stable, or if integration increases, then there shouldn't be any special problem." Equally open-ended and hardly more reassuring is the view of a third: "In ten or fifteen years if we haven't licked the race question, trans-racial adoptions won't make any difference anyway."

Subsidized adoptions

A companion-piece to the emphasis on low and unstable incomes as a deterrent, and the plea for finding adoptive parents among lower-middle and low-income families, is the prevailing approval for the idea of subsidized adoptions. Almost three-fourths of the respondents express some opinion about them, with views running ten to one in favor of subsidized adoptions, while a few (about one in eight) have mixed feelings. Many of those who expressed opinions had not been familiar with the idea of subsidized adoptions, but were ready with an opinion when it was explained. [19] Among those who did have experience, definite opinions also favored it ten to one, but an additional few expressed some reservations.

The chief reasons for favoring subsidized adoptions are that many people who would make good parents cannot afford to adopt, and subsidy would greatly increase the number of available homes. A few suggest that, with sufficient subsidy, even welfare clients could adopt children and would make good parents. More frequent is the view that subsidy would enable some good foster homes to become permanent, stabilizing the attachment that has already developed between foster parents and the children. Some say that a low-income home is much better than an institution, and that subsidized adoptions would be much less expensive to society than such present arrangements as long-term foster care or institutionalization. Some also suggest that short-term subsidy could be given to young couples who would be expected to have an adequate income later on. There is an occasional suggestion also that subsidy would help in placing older children or those with special health problems, so that they, too, could gain a warm and stable home.

> "Subsidizing could possibly be the means of recruiting more than enough black homes for the children needing them."

> "It also would encourage more people to adopt. I can't see why these things take so long. It is more expensive to keep a child in an institution. A child in there for eighteen years can't communicate with the outside world and gets a poor education besides. Did you read those articles on those city institutions?"

> "A favorite formula-idea...is the 'pretend' couple with a $200 income and much parental capacity. Let the State pay them $100 monthly for each of six children. Total income becomes $800. The State terminates supervision, perhaps also pays legal costs. Total cost is still far less to the State than foster care. This fact should and can be proved statistically to state legislatures, with examples."

"I did not know this was being done. This would definitely be an incentive. This would help foster parents that wanted to adopt. It would also give something to go on for those people who have thought about adoption but have not felt sure they could manage. I am sure people would respond to it."

"He believed that, of these methods, the subsidized adoption was our greatest hope of meeting the needs of the black children awaiting homes. He mentioned that California and New York were subsidizing adoptions with great success. He was surprised and dismayed that the public agencies in this area could not engage in this practice because of legal technicalities and source of funding. He made a mental note to look into this matter further."

A few agency people report an impression that "agency staffs aren't accepting the idea of subsidy", even in some places where it is legally authorized.

"There have been many fewer adoptions with the subsidy than were anticipated since the law went into effect. Workers, I believe, are resisting this. Why, I don't know. I don't think voluntary workers were pushing or are pushing the subsidy. Furthermore, many children are under contract to the State to keep them in foster homes. This keeps them there."

"We need a good subsidized adoption program. I haven't been asked to do one case of subsidized adoption and I don't know any worker who has."

"Subsidized adoptions began last summer. People just aren't being referred. I have not received any such assignments."

The minority who disapprove outright or have mixed opinions about subsidized adoption are concerned, above all, about the motives of subsidized adoptive parents. "People would adopt for the money, and agencies would be paying someone who might be mistreating the child." One would have to make sure it is being done "for love of the child rather than for love of money." Questions are raised also about the parent-child relationship, whether the child would feel he was being paid for, whether the parents would feel like "real parents", with the full dignity, responsibility, and independence of parenthood.

"One of the main gratifications is to feel you're doing the job yourself."

"I think you give a child more if you scuffle to make it, to send him to school, to buy his clothes."

"Money can make people do crazy things--like thinking they want to adopt when they really don't."

Other misgivings are that subsidized adoption has some of the disadvantages of public assistance--for example, you can never be sure that the subsidy won't be cut off at a later time; or that current programs are too narrow and force agencies into subterfuges, such as creating a foster home in order to convert it to subsidized adoption.

Nevertheless, the strong consensus favors subsidized adoptions, with occasional suggestions that there should be a federal program; also that travel and other pre-placement expenses (especially in interstate adoptions) should be covered under such a program.

"With all the government money going other places, for example like raising agricultural subsidies, I don't see why there can't be funds for this."

"We subsidize everything else, including the military and the large farm owner, so why should we not subsidize adoption--a human commodity."

Foster-parent adoptions

Adoption by foster parents, when discussed, is brought up chiefly in conjunction with subsidized adoption, since they are often related. Nevertheless, it is recognized that not all subsidized adoptions are by foster parents and not all foster-parent adoptions are subsidized. Less than one-third of the respondents bring up the subject. Among those who do, outright opposition is very rare, but approval is often qualified, and a few do not reach a clear judgment pro or con. Nevertheless, it is clear that those who discuss this kind of placement on the whole favor it, provided careful study of the individuals involved reveals no contraindications. In some instances the approval, though carefully qualified, is hearty.

The idea of foster care as a "trial adoption" is seen by some as a great advantage. No support is given to the rule of some states against allowing foster parents to adopt a child already in their care.

The two main reasons for endorsing the conversion of a foster-home placement into an adoption are: (1) that this will mean stability and a "real home of his own" for the child, obviating the threat of further placements; (2) that the parents and children already know each other and the desire to adopt must mean they love each other. A few point out that sometimes such a placement can remove the need to separate siblings.

Qualified approval usually relates to concern about the advanced age of some foster parents and the possibility that because of their age they would be "rigid". A few say that foster parents are usually not as carefully selected as adoptive parents, different criteria are applied, and therefore they may not be suitable for full adoption. There is occasional concern, too, that if the foster home includes several foster children, adoption of only one might create serious problems.

Some foster parents who would like to adopt, and would make good adoptive parents, may be unable to do so for lack of money, and in such cases, a subsidy would be of great benefit to the child. Such adoptions, it is thought, could be especially desirable for the "older child".

> "The largest number of subsidies come from our foster-care department....No supervision of the family is given. The family is expected to maintain its own standard of living, considered individually on the basis of its educational and cultural pattern. No budget is required. We find people are very honest about these applications, reflecting their respect for the lives of children. The newly approved laws of nation and state providing adoption subsidy funds should diminish foster-care numbers."

> "More foster homes are coming into adoption since the new subsidy law. These are mostly long-term black foster children, in some cases even multiple adoptions by a family."

> "Sometimes, I think maybe it would be better to have people go through foster care with one or two children before they actually get around to adopting. That way, some of the things that they think about children, particularly adopted children, could be eased, preparing them for a more successful taking care of a youngster after they have adopted it."

"Many foster parents are sensitive about subsidy. Caseworkers understand this sensitive area, and a family's need to delay adoption while they try to save enough money to cover adoption, rejecting subsidy. The Judge may misunderstand the delay, interpreting it as sloppy casework or family's lack of interest. Current forms for subsidy are too involved and therefore awesome."

"Agencies often have an unwritten policy that's almost as if written: foster home parents are unsuitable adoptive parents or even unsuitable parents. I've often wondered why."

Older parents

Adoption by older parents receives predominant, though often qualified, approval among those who discuss it. Almost two-thirds of the respondents express no clear-cut opinion, but among those who do, more than five out of six are favorable.[20] Outright disapproval is rare, and none of those who express it claims direct experience with or observation of such adoptions. Definite approval is three times as frequent as mixed or neutral comments.

Those who approve make it clear that by "older" they do not mean "really old", but merely older than the age usually considered appropriate for adoptive applicants. "Forty-five is not too old in the black community to start on a second set of children." Some say not over fifty, others specify the fifties--the age at which many people first become grandparents. Such views are often supported by references to the many grandparents who raise their grandchildren and seem to do a good job of it.

The age of the child, it is often pointed out, must be related to that of the parents. Older parents should not adopt infants, but children four to seven years old may be appropriate for parents in their forties, and teenagers for those in their fifties.

"Older people are better parents because they're more settled economically, and emotionally able to give more love and affection than younger parents."

"Having a child keeps you young."

Probably no one else would adopt a teenager, so with all the inherent problems--communication gap, lack of understand, etc.--older own parents would be better than no parents at all."

Rather than a blanket policy (on age), each individual should be evaluated. There are people in their sixties much better able to be parents. Grandparents are often involved in black families taking care of and rearing a child. I was raised by my grandmother and grandfather."

Definite approval is likely to be qualified by some of the same provisos that prompt inconclusive answers: the importance of considering the health and energy of the adoptive applicants, the need for a supportive and interested extended family in case the parents become ill or die, selecting of applicants who "think young", the importance of careful individual study, follow-up, and consultation with older parents, the advantage of selecting older parents who have had children of their own.

"I'd feel easier with someone who had had children, though I wouldn't discriminate against someone who was childless."

"I don't think that people over fifty who had no children should be considered as prospective adopters as they wouldn't know what was involved in raising a child. If these people were being considered, I'd hope for a very thorough and careful investigation of their suitability."

Outright disapproval, when it is expressed, rests, to some extent, on the qualifications often associated with approval. Older people, it is said, do not have the strength and energy to cope with a young child, their health might fail, or they might die before the child grows up. Also, the generation gap or communication gap interferes with their effectiveness as parents of a teenager. One or two grant the frequency with which grandparents raise their children's children, but think that the results do not speak well for older-parent adoptions.

A very few object that older adoptive parents,"like so many grandparents", are likely to be over-protective and over-indulgent.

"God made a way to cut off having children after a certain age and so should agencies."

"Parents should grow up with their children--they should be able to do things together."

"Older people sometimes have funny ideas about how things should be done."

"No older person should seek an unrelated child in adoption because they don't have the necessary patience, stamina, or understanding. Talk about a generation gap within own families--older people would probably create monsters."

RECRUITING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

To say that different kinds of adoptive parents should be sought is merely the first step. The second step is to say how it should be done. On this point also the respondents have a good deal of advice. Some speak from a background of direct experience with different approaches. More, however, rely on generalized information or assumptions. Analysis of the responses took account of this difference.

The stated purpose of the inquiry was to obtain a background for planning efforts to increase the number of adoptive homes for black children, rather than to find a blueprint for mounting such efforts. However, the experiences and ideas of respondents about recruitment methods are an important part of this background, and most of the interviews include discussion of recruitment.

The mass media

Use of the mass media--television, radio, newspapers, magazines--is by far the most frequently mentioned method of recruiting more adoptive parents, and is often the only one mentioned. Three-fourths of the respondents have something to say about it.

Two main functions are emphasized: giving information and moving people to apply for an adoptive child. Information relates to: (1) the magnitude and the urgency of the need; (2) the dispelling of myths about adoption and adoptive children; (3) the dispelling of misconceptions about current policies and practices with regard to adoption. The information aspect is seen as contributing to the action aspect by increasing motivation to adopt and diminishing unfounded deterrents to adoption.

Television is the medium preferred by most of those who discussed mass media campaigns, but newspapers and magazines are specifically referred to by over half of those who discuss the media. Radio receives little attention.

For the most part, it is assumed or stated that mass media campaigns are useful and important for recruitment. Criticisms are more likely to be directed at specific features or omissions of programs or "spots", than at the efficacy of mass media appeals. However, a minority (about one in six of those who discuss the media) express misgivings about the effectivenesss of mass media appeals. Although the proportion of doubters is small, it is noteworthy that for the most part they speak from direct experience with efforts to recruit adoptive parents in this way.

A recurrent problem reported by this small group is that the effort and expense of such a campaign is out of proportion to the number of placements actually attributable to it. Shortage of staff and funds is also seen as a problem, since the greatly increased number of calls cannot be coped with quickly, and leads to discouragement and dropping out of applicants.

> "One problem we have is that there are not enough staff members to do all the work that needs doing. We get a good response to all our ads, but...if you take a couple of months before getting people who call scheduled, they can get very discouraged. If a worker doesn't get interviews scheduled very closely, she can miss out on a lot of clients."
>
> "In the recruitment campaign we got over one hundred inquiries and completed about five home studies."
>
> "I think that the staff expenditure of time is out of proportion to the number of couples gained. While it helps create a climate, it also intensifies the number of contacts. Many of the calls are just inquiries and a lot of time goes into sifting them."
>
> "Black people view the mass media in this country with a jaundiced eye. They know it's not directed toward them."
>
> "One of the problems is that you cannot really measure or know what influences lead a couple to adopt a child. A person may pick up a piece of literature one day and it might take two or three years before they will actually call about adoption."

One or two of those who raise questions about mass media appeals qualify their objections by indicating that such campaigns may be useful, if and only if they are used in conjunction with other efforts.

"If I were to do it again I think we should do the same thing initially in terms of mass publicity, but I would not see mass publicity as the overall strategy." [21] The approving majority also occasionally specify that mass media campaigns must be combined with other methods, especially with more direct person-to-person contacts.

Specific "do's" and "don'ts" concern both the form and the content of mass media presentations, and for the most part refer to television spots or features. The chief ones are:

** Timing is essential to the effectiveness of TV presentations. Too often they appear at a time when people are working, and therefore do not see them; or else they appear at midnight, when most TV's are turned off. They should be done during prime time, in the early evening, so that they will really be seen.

** The children who need homes should not be presented as forlorn and pathetic, but rather as healthy, "normal", appealing children--except for special appeals in behalf of those who are definitely handicapped. "There's too much of this 'poor little waif' business." The prevailing appeal should mainly be positive rather than negative.

** There should be more informative interviews, more features, and more spots, but not a "panel of social workers giving stale answers to stale questions".

** Mass media presentations should be designed to increase the recruitment of adoptive parents partly by exploding some of the myths that deter people from adopting and by dissipating some of the anxieties. They should show people that agencies are not unduly strict in their requirements, and that "social workers are not ogres".

** TV presentations should show all kinds of adoptive parents--not just the affluent and the middle-class. They should let the working class and poor people know that they, too, are wanted as adoptive parents. "Reach out with pictures of all kinds of children and a variety of adoptive and foster parents. Assure the blue collar worker that he has the resources we need."

** Agencies should make more use of the "black media"--use publications like Ebony, Jet, Black World; get prime "ethnic radio spots"; develop TV serials especially for black audiences. Use ads as well as features in the publications addressed primarily to Negroes.

"The public relations material...has not been directed to the black community. The emphasis is on a home for a black child whereas it should be on a black home for a black child. There are enough black families and groups to meet the need of homes for black children. We have not really reached the black community nor been creative and innovative enough in our efforts."

** Mass media campaigns must be sustained in order to be effective; a "one-shot" approach alone will not accomplish much. The need for sustained efforts is emphasized again and again, in connection with all recruitment approaches:

"When people hear things over and over it begins to become a part of their thinking and they finally start talking about it."

"We need a continuing program of appeal like the ad to 'adopt or be foster parent to a foreign child'. You can't pick up a magazine without finding this advertisement and people flock to help these children, forgetting or not knowing that there are so many children who need them right here."

"Let there be a barrage of continuous and varied efforts..."

Personal contact

The prevailing belief in the efficacy of mass media campaigns for recruiting adoptive parents does not preclude strong emphasis on the value of personal contact. This is the approach generally favored by the minority who take a dim view of mass media campaigns. It is also advocated by some who express no doubt about the value of such campaigns, but who think they must be coordinated with direct approaches to groups and individuals. The experienced sometimes add that such approaches also must be sustained, rather than limited to a single contact.

Some favor a full-time recruiter, preferably black. One suggests that paraprofessionals from a poverty agency would be "good as recruiters because they can get out there where they live in their neighborhoods and really work with people about adoption." In some form, about one-fourth of all the respondents emphasize the value of a personal rather than a general approach to potential adoptive parents.

"Most of all I want to use personal contact more than the media. Black people here will pay more attention to this than to the radio."

"It would have to be a hard-hitting sell, perhaps door-to-door, certainly constant. Sending or passing out forms and speaking at meetings count for nothing. Bring in money and work into the community structure."

"There are many potential adopters being missed in low-income groups. Agencies need to get out and talk to the black people...The emphasis must be on reaching the people where they are and not on pulling them into agencies."

"Mrs. M. recalls in other agencies the effective use made of non-professional people in outreach, e.g. door-to-door, shopping centers, school contacts, physician contacts, churches, CAP contacts, use of non-professional staff--all used by health services to get people in, as for rubella innoculations."

"Do like we do, go door-to-door for recruitment, go after it, the same way we go after these Headstart kids. Because people don't go nowhere to take on more work and take on more responsibility. So you have to take it out there to them."

"If the agency were really committed to reaching black adoptive parents, they'd hire more people to do publicity and handle the increasing response to this recruiting."

Adoptive parents

A good many (including some adoptive parents) think that adoptive parents are excellent agents for increasing their own ranks. Some cite instances in which the example of happy adoptive families has stimulated friends and acquaintances to seek adoptive children themselves. Others report or recommend group meetings in which adoptive parents tell about their own rewarding experiences and dispel some of the misgivings with which potential applicants view adoption and the placement process. A social worker tells of her agency's surprise at the readiness of some adoptive parents to speak publicly about their individual experiences in adoption. A community representative suggests having new applicants meet with an adoptive parent after the first interview "in order to relieve the tensions". A few suggest

that such contacts might be helpful also to the adoptive parents.

Almost as many oppose as approve attempts to involve adoptive parents in recruitment efforts, usually because they have found, or believe, that this is disliked and felt to be an invasion of privacy. Those who speak from experience present mixed opinions, with a very slight preponderance of approval. Apparently experience has differed in this respect, possibly because of the individuals involved and possibly because of differences in the way the efforts were approached and conducted.

> "Parents really sell the idea of adoption best. On our committee are a cross-section of community people. There are people in business and almost anybody but social workers. They meet once a month here. They plan programs for recruitment. Once a year they give the parents' party in a public place in honor of the parents. The new parents get a special admission and get publicity."

> "We had an Adoption Sunday in 1967 and used them then. We got together about fifteen to twenty adoptive parents. One headed contacts with churches, another community contacts. I was surprised when several of them said they would personally go to churches to speak as adoptive parents and talk with people who were interested. I was surprised because I thought there would be a desire for confidentiality about their adoption. I really didn't know that they would extend themselves in this way, but I found the humanitarian factor so great."

> "Also, some adoptive parents would not prefer the spotlight on adoption in their lives that such membership would create. Let the agencies make the outreach and not depend on the adoptive parent."

> "This agency has tried using adoptive parents in groups for recruitment, but has had little success. Again, the many basic concerns of black families seem to interfere."

> "Attempts to organize adoptive parent groups fail because adoptive parents become very contented and forget the needs of others."

Community approaches

Church groups. Opinions divide rather evenly about efforts to recruit adoptive parents through church groups. However, those with direct experience in such efforts are generally pessimistic about their effectiveness, while those who speak on the basis of general assumptions are considerably more optimistic.

Those who endorse such efforts say that the church is morally obligated to exert leadership in finding homes for children, and that clergymen can help to dispel some myths that might deter people from adopting. A few suggest that the church can be more useful in educating people about the facts of adoption than in actually recruiting parents.

The skeptics say that the church has lost influence, young people don't go to church any more, and church appeals have not produced results. One or two say that people in low-income congregations have too many other problems. One of the most poignant comments comes from the minister of a church:

> "The churches are caught up now in survival. They have a role of offering stability in the new Cultural Revolution, and of learning how to change. The church and synagogue, as institutions, have never initiated movements; they jump on bandwagons. They will die with this generation and live again in other forms--on streets, in homes, in bars. It has gotten too complex, just as the city has. Look for no significant help from it. It has lost its human touch and cannot even administer. The white man eases his social guilt here, and his children are exposing him. Young people are not joining. Their energy is going into community help programs."

There is an occasional statement or implication that efforts to work with churches have failed for three reasons: (1) they have been "one-shot" events rather than sustained programs; (2) they have been directed toward middle-class congregations; (3) they have relied on merely putting up posters or passing out brochures rather than person-to-person contacts. Those who make these points believe that the church is an important community institution among the working class and that sustained efforts--for example, a series of workshops--could be fruitful.

All in all, the comments about recruiting adoptive parents through church groups add up to: (1) general feeling among those who have tried this approach that it has not been fruitful; (2) general feeling among those who have not tried it that it ought to be fruitful; (3) speculation among both groups that, if methods--and possibly target groups--were altered, approaches through church groups could be made much more effective than most of them have been so far.

> "Nothing has come out of the churches, beleaguered with survival and community problems as they are."
>
> "Response from local ministers has been enthusiastic but results from their congregations have been minimal."
>
> "They have few active members now....They don't attract the young anymore. As soon as the middle-aged and elderly die, the church is dead."
>
> "The thing that struck me was that we hit only black middle-class churches. I don't think it should be this way....I'm beginning to think of middle-class blacks as pretty hard core. Why do we have to gear everything to middle-class blacks? Why can't we hit another class?"

Committees and organizations. Among those with actual experience in such efforts, opinions divide about the usefulness of setting up local committees to stimulate recruitment of adoptive parents. The relatively few others who speak about such committees usually recommend them. Again, it is clear that experience has differed, and that the differences may relate either to the local community, the groups approached, or the methods and individual characteristics of those who organized the committees.

A considerable number of organizations are mentioned that have been or could be helpful in organizing their own committees and campaigns. These include fraternal organizations like the Elks or Masons, fraternities and sororities, local PTA's, large industrial firms, professional organizations, unions, civic groups, community organizations, "national organizations like the Urban League", etc. One or two advise efforts to interest "prestigious individuals"--the Mayor, outstanding black leaders, entertainment personalities, sports personalities, etc. And again the need for continuity is stressed.

"Try harder to reach Operation Breadbasket of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. If ever they would include black adoption among their projects (essentially economic), we would have it made in this town."

"What groups of persons do people first talk over adoption with--lawyers, doctors? How can these be used? What use can be made of the National (black) Medical Association, for example?"

"My general feeling was that we did not test anything long enough to really know what works best. It was always the same old people at the same old committees and we would end up with just another coffee klatch."

"Whatever we do has to have strong, continuous leadership."

Needed: Coordination and collaboration

A theme running throughout recommendations for recruitment efforts, and especially stressed by those with experience in them, is the need for coordination: coordination of methods, coordination of agencies, coordination of efforts by participating committees, groups, and individuals.

The need for coordination of methods has been brought out in connection with "Do's and Don'ts" relating to media campaigns. TV presentations, it is urged, must be combined with person-to-person contacts, group meetings or workshops and, some add, with sustained efforts by a full-time recruiter who is well acquainted with the local community.

In addition, those with direct experience are likely to advocate active, planned, sustained coordination between agencies and other groups or organizations. The most enthusiastic success stories tend to involve this kind of coordination.

Such efforts, in turn, would need to be coordinated with several kinds of agency effort: (1) informational and educational campaigns; (2) modification of practices that serve as deterrents to adoption; (3) preparation to cope with increased numbers of applications. In addition to being coordinated, efforts must be carefully planned, and sustained over a considerable time period.

One effective project, undertaker by a social agency, has combined the following methods: preliminary workshops with agency staff, active

Board involvement, participation in adoption exchange program, collaboration with other placement agencies and with non-agency groups, committees, and organizations, flexibility in practices and procedures, a local recruitment office in an appropriate neighborhood, enlistment of assistance from a well-organized group of adoptive parents, collaboration with other local groups, group meetings for adoptive applicants--black and white, retaining of a public relations consultant and a community organizer, use of TV spots, articles in newspapers (city-wide, neighborhood, and ethnic), circulation of posters and brochures in shopping centers, professional offices, hospitals, and payroll envelopes of cooperating large industrial firms.

> "Contributing factors to our increase in placements are: full-time telephone coverage with back-up staff in readiness; more availability of staff which makes for more time to devote to specifics; and the new black awareness. There is still a tremendous need for a recruiter on the staff, preferably black, and for continuous publicity."

"A community of agencies". A theme sounded chiefly by those with direct experience in recruitment efforts is the need for agencies to collaborate and cooperate more effectively among themselves. This theme occasionally comes out in stories of successful agency coordination. One example, cited by several local respondents, is an interagency information service which is described as serving a community of agencies and as served by an active and effective auxiliary of community people.

Some, who have no success stories to relate, deplore the lack of agency coordination and collaboration on their local scene. One social worker speaks sadly of a communication gap and collaboration gap between public and voluntary agencies, suggesting that to some extent there is a status problem involved. Another deplores the unwillingness of some agencies to accept the initial work of other agencies, and go on from where they left off, and their insistence on "starting all over again from scratch", with resulting disaffection of applicants and loss of potential homes.

> "Agencies don't trust one another. If agency X doesn't have enough status, then agency Y won't accept a home study done by X."

> "I was told privately that we can't ask the private agencies for an older child, because 'private agencies don't trust us'."

"Agencies must trust each other; they get too possessive about their wards."

"Something ought to be done about getting the Community Chest involved. One agency is not enough. So far there seems to have been no interest on the part of the Chest and push should be coming from that end."

There are complaints also about insufficient state-wide and interstate coordination and collaboration. Effective instances of both are described with approval, but the prevailing view is that they are not as widespread, as active, or as free from obstacles as they should be.

"We accept (nonwhite) applicants from out-of-state.... We send our workers out instead of asking an out-of-state agency to do the home study. If another state wants a non-white child, our practice is then to write those state agencies for their assistance in doing a home study."

"Our inter-agency organization should have a statewide adoption coordinator, trusted by member agencies. He could open up homes in new state areas, and further facilitate the movement of children to families. In fact, every state should have such a coordinator."

Effective integration. Thus, one important message delivered by these respondents is a plea for less "segregation" and more "integration" in a special sense: for broadening the definition of potential adoptive parents to include groups and individuals formerly left out or ruled out of consideration as adoptive parents; for integrating recruitment methods, to avoid "one-shot" activities and a single type of appeal, and aiming rather at combining the ways in which recruitment efforts can be mounted and the groups or individuals active in these efforts.

If the target groups are broadened, if various methods are coordinated, if agencies, organizations, and groups integrate their efforts, if deterrents to adoption are modified through public education and through agency accommodations, the strong consensus among these respondents is that a substantially larger part of the need can be met. This consensus was reported at the outset. The intervening pages have been devoted to spelling out their views concerning the obstacles to reaching the goal of a family for every child and some ways in which many of these obstacles can be overcome.

ALTERNATIVES TO ADOPTION

Although there is strong consensus among the respondents that the number of available adoptive families can be increased greatly, there is less assurance that even "really trying" will find enough to provide for all the black children who are in need of homes.

A question about the possibility is implicit in the statement of an agency executive who has participated in an unusually effective effort:

> "Although we have tripled the number of black children we placed since the beginning of our recruitment project, we are aware that that number will not even slightly affect the total number of children who are waiting. We are, however, quite enthusiastic about the response we have received so far, and we are hopeful that by the end of the project our experience will be of some value in identifying an approach to the solution of the problem."

Interviewers did not regularly inquire about possible alternatives to adoption, if enough families are not found. However, some respondents (about one in five) volunteered suggestions about other ways of meeting the need.

The suggestions are not necessarily enthusiastic. Some see no real substitute for family life, and some fear that any group facility would "deteriorate to a foundling home". Those who raise the possibility of alternatives to individual family placement, however, for the most part incline to the opinion that, if we really broke through some traditional assumptions, it would be possible to work out various forms of caring for groups of children in a way that would promote their healthy development. The main assumptions they call into question are the indispensability of a nuclear family to healthy development, and the unfavorable effects of any kind of group homes. The second assumption, they say, is based on evidence that poor group care can harm children, but they point to examples of small group arrangements, including some in other countries and some in the United States, that seem to have worked out well.

Suggestions include small group homes and "composed families" made up of children of different ages. Larger group care facilities are also occasionally favored, with reference to the Kibbutzim in Israel, or to "community centers", with "the community taking responsibility". Very few respondents go so far as to advocate "breaking through our obsession with the nuclear family", but others clearly see a need for seting up group living arrangements, sometimes implying rather large groups and sometimes family-size groups with children of assorted ages. Several of these emphasized the need for such group facilities to be an integral part of the community, with neighborhood families actively involved and responsible. References to group living arrangements tend to be rather vague, and to focus more on breaking through the "prejudice against a group facility" than on specific ways of organizing and conducting it.

> "We can never replace an individual's need to belong to a family, as described by adoptive applicants who once were in foster care. They recalled how difficult holidays were in group homes...."

"I think the whole question of institutions should be looked into. I know child care institutions have sometimes gotten a bad name but I think that we have to be aware of the possibility of transformation of thinking in the black community about the usefulness of these institutions. I can recall my own experience in Gary, Indiana where we had a black institution for children. There was no stigma attached to being in this institution. All of us went to the same school and were friends."

"I have never had negative attitudes about institutions, but whites do. This is because they are tied to the theoretical model of the nuclear family and what a child gets from it."

"I like the idea of group homes and it seems to me that more of these ought to be available. I also had experience in working with an institution in Dobbs Ferry, New York and I liked the way the institution was integrated in the life of the community. We might need to have some institutions like this."

"For a number of years I have been interested in the extent to which certain kinds of group experiences can provide what we so often assume that only the nuclear family can provide. We have to look at this and see what can be done. We have to see how community families with children can be related to the ongoing work of the institution."

"Society is, for the most part, against communes, so the children might not be allowed to attain their full development. That could be a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'."

"If we could really organize our community into communal living or communal living homes, where a number of people are responsible for children in the community, a goodly number of the homes that we currently cannot consider favorable for adoptions could be utilized."

Help the natural families. A very different kind of alternative is likely to be recommended by those who discuss alternatives at all: that we should strengthen the original families so that fewer children would require placement. Services for unmarried mothers should be improved, so that they could keep their own children, according to a few. Others recommend income maintenance as one means to diminish family stress and breakdown. It is not implied that such developments would quickly eliminate the need for strenuous efforts to find more adoptive homes, but rather that in the long run they would serve to diminish the numbers needing placement, and that the supports and services recommended would serve the needs of society in other ways also. [22]

"Parents often have to place their kids because they are too poor. If they go on public assistance, they would get less to care for their own child, than would the foster family to take care of the child of the poor people. I looked this up specifically, so I feel I know."

"The system of foster care payments, which allows a foster family an adequate amount but denies it to the real parents, militates against reconstituting the family. If parents could become foster parents to their own children, that would be more like it."

"In the past, ninety percent of the state's money for boarding children has gone to foster care. The first dollar properly should go toward his natural home and the second toward finding permanent homes."

MAIN POINTS IN BRIEF

Opinions divide about whether enough adoptive homes could be found to receive all the black children in need of placement, but the strong consensus is that the number could be increased radically, if "real" efforts were made.

"Real" efforts, as defined by the respondents, would be more effective in removing or diminishing deterrents to adoption than in augmenting incentives--except for the incentive supplied by more effective publicizing of the magnitude and urgency of the need for more adoptive homes.

The chief reasons for adoption are said to be:

Love of children
Desire for self-fulfillment
Social consciousness or conscience
Social acceptability and conformity

Reported deterrents to adoption:

The deterrents discussed with most frequency and most intensity concern the image, policies, and practices of child-placing agencies. The public image of "the" social agency is described as forbidding and rejecting. Three facets singled out for special mention are: middle-class bias, white orientation or "racism", and readiness to "screen out rather than screen in".

Charges of bias tend to merge and sometimes to confuse prejudices relating to race and to class--a merging to be reckoned with in recruitment efforts. Opinions divide between preference for black social workers to deal with black applicants and belief that individual competence and human response are more important than ethnic background. Recommendations include ways of overcoming race and class bias on the part of agencies as organizations, of social workers as individuals, and of agency Boards.

Among specific complaints about agency practices, top mention goes to: (1) the time and "red tape" involved in completing an adoption; (2) "psychological probing"; (3) emphasis on "externals" such as housing and income, rather than ability to love and rear children.

Criticisms are described as a mixture of myths and realities, experience and hearsay, past and present. However, it is clear that: (1) some popular misconceptions or distortions do operate as strong deterrents to adoption; (2) some practices discarded by many or most agencies do still survive among others; (3) some of the sharpest criticisms come from staff members of social agencies; (4) some of the most appreciative comments about specific agencies come from adoptive parents. Criticism of agency policies and practices is often coupled with approval of modifications and innovations introduced by specified agencies.

Other reported deterrents to adoption:

Economic insecurity of black families, plus the fact that many are already caring for the children of relatives.
Lack of public information about the magnitude and urgency of the need.
Alleged threat to the "manhood" of the potential adoptive father.
Concern about the possible heredity of the child.
Legal complications.

Broadening the target group:

The most urgent recommendation is to broaden the specification for adoptive parenthood and to implement this definition: by reaching out to the black and the non-affluent; by encouraging adoptions by single parents, foster parents, and older parents; and by subsidy to adoptive parents. All these types of placement receive prevailing approval. Trans-racial adoptions, however, evoke a rather even division for and against, with disapproval far more intense than approval.

Recommended recruitment methods:

Mass media campaigns designed to:
a. Make known the magnitude and urgency of the need
b. Dispel myths and misconceptions that act as deterrents
c. Motivate people to become adoptive parents

Reaching potential adoptive parents through groups, organizations, and individual personal contacts

Utilizing full-time recruiters familiar with the neighborhoods to which they are assigned

Two dominant themes:

Emphasized especially by those with experience in recruitment efforts are:

1. Successful recruitment must be carefully planned, and must be sustained over a considerable time period--"one-shot splurges" are likely to prove ineffective, and agencies must be prepared to handle quickly an increased number of applications.

2. Successful recruitment requires effective "integration"--that is, a variety of coordinated methods, employed by a variety of collaborating groups and organizations.

   Effective integration of methods and groups requires a "true community of agencies", functioning with cooperation, coordination, and mutual respect--a community which must be effective on the local, state, and national levels. Such a community, according to some social workers among the respondents, has not yet been achieved.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. National Center for Social Statistics, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Adoptions in 1969: Supplement to Child Welfare Statistics--1969, Report CW-1 (69) Supplement. Washington, D. C. 20402: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969.

2. Lucille J. Grow, A New Look at Supply and Demand in Adoption. New York, N.Y.: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1970, 15 pp.

3. About 171,000 children were adopted in the United States in 1969, of whom--as noted--about 14,000, or eight percent, were black children, although the proportion of black children among all those needing placement is far greater than the proportion (13.9 percent) of black children in our child population, 0 to 14 years of age. A rough and informal estimate made by Children's Bureau research staff in 1969 was that at least 40,000 Negro children (and possibly many more) were available for adoption in that year.

   A natural but disturbing companion-piece to the small proportion of black children among all those adopted is the large proportion of black children among those in foster care. Billingsley and Giovannoni cite figures from two studies comparing the relevant proportions in New York and in Los Angeles. "In New York, for example, black children accounted for less than ten percent of all children adopted in 1967. However, black and Puerto Rican children comprised over eighty percent of the children in institutional shelter care. Similarly, in Los Angeles in 1967, eight percent of the adoptive placements were of black children and a similar number of Mexican children. However, these two groups comprised half of all children in foster care under the Department of Social Services' supervision." (Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne M. Giovannoni, Black Children in Need of Parents. New York, N. Y.: Harcourt-Brace-Jovanovich, In press.)

4. Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, and Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations, Vol. I. New York, N.Y.: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1951, 421 pp.

5. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, "Poverty in the United States: 1969", Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 76. Washington, D. C. 20402: U. S. Government Printing Office, December 16, 1970, 82 pp.

   Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor, The Negroes in the United States-Their Economic and Social Situation, Bulletin No. 1511. Washington, D. C. 20402: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966, 241 pp.

6. An estimate published in 1970 set the cost of rearing a child to age 18, on a low-cost level of living, between $23,070 and $25,560. (Jean Pennock, "Child-Rearing Costs at Two Levels of Living, by Family Size", Family Economics Review, December 1970.)

7. Elizabeth Herzog and Rose Bernstein, "Why So Few Negro Adoptions?", Children 12:1:14-18, January-February 1965.

   A later estimate (1968), in which it was possible to separate Negro from other nonwhite adoption figures, places the rate for white families above the poverty level slightly higher than for Negro families. However, allowing for the higher income of whites, even above the poverty level, and the large number of informal adoptions among Negroes, the story remains basically the same: that, when relevant factors are controlled, Negroes do not seem to lag behind whites in readiness to adopt.

8. Oscar Lewis, Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family. New York, N.Y.: Random House, Inc., 1961, 499 pp.

   Walter B. Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency", Journal of Social Issues 14:3:5-19, 1958.

   It is noteworthy that, among several earlier studies that sought to discover deterrents to adoption by Negroes, not one pointed to the "male ego threat". (Irving A. Fowler, "The Urban Middle-Class Negro and Adoption: Two Series of Studies and Their Implications for Action", Child Welfare 45:9:522-525, November 1966; Connecticut Child Welfare Association, Negro Attitudes Toward Adoption in Hartford, September 1965, 51 pp.; Leila Calhoun Deasy and Olive Westbrooke Quinn, "The Urban Negro and Adoption of Children", Child Welfare 41:9:400-407, November 1962; David Fanshel, A Study in Negro Adoption. New York, N.Y.: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1957, 107 pp.)

9. Many of the points relating to agency policies and practices have been reported in earlier studies, dating back at least to the early sixties. (Josephine A. Braden, "Adoption in a Changing World", Social Casework 51:8:486-490, October 1970; Grow, op. cit.;

Edwin Riday, Supply and Demand in Adoption. New York, N.Y.: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., July 1969, 21 pp.; Raymond Mondloh, "Changing Practice in the Adoptive Home Study", Child Welfare 48:3:148-156, March 1969; Irving W. Fellner, "Recruiting Adoptive Applicants", Social Work 13:1:92-100, January 1968; Ursula M. Gallagher, Problems and Progress in Adoption, presented at symposium on The Problems in Adoption, January 27-29, 1968, San Francisco, Calif. Available from Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1968, 8 pp.; Ursula Gallagher, "Adoption: Current Trends", Welfare in Review 5:2:12-20, February 1967; Myron R. Chevlin, "Adoption Outlook", Child Welfare 46:1:75-82, February 1967; Fowler, op. cit.; Lydia Hylton, "Trends in Adoption, 1958-1962", Child Welfare 44:7:377-385, July 1965; Rita Dukette and Thelma G. Thompson, Adoptive Resources for Negro Children. New York, N.Y.: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., August 1959, 35 pp.)

A precise picture of current adoption agency requirements is not available. That changes have occurred is clear from numerous articles, and from reports of special efforts to increase the number of placements. Two publications by the Child Welfare League of America (Hylton, op. cit.; Riday, op. cit.) report on a number of changes in the direction of greater flexibility among the agencies sampled: 672 as of 1962 and 282 as of 1968.

10. Hylton (op. cit.) reports that, in 1962, one-third of the public agencies and two-thirds of the voluntary agencies reporting had relaxed some of their requirements. However, of the eight changes most often reported, accepting the mother's employment was sixth, outranking only religious matching and proof of infertility. By the time of Riday's (op. cit.) survey in 1967, however, accepting the mother's employment was the next to most frequent change, reported by about one-third of the agencies sampled.

11. In a study conducted by the Children's Bureau, a number of adoptive mothers who had conceived after adopting a child, gave the adoption credit for their ability to do so, and thought this had enhanced their affection for the adopted child. The study found that "home ratings tended to be at least average, and possibly higher than average, when 'own' children were born after the adopted child was placed or when other children were adopted later". (Helen L. Witmer, Elizabeth Herzog, Eugene Weinstein, and Mary Sullivan, Independent Adoptions: A Follow-up Study. New York, N.Y.: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963, 463 pp. See also Michael Humphrey, The Hostage Seekers. New York, N.Y.: Humanities Press, Inc., 1969, 162 pp.)

12. In both of the surveys made by the Child Welfare League of America (1962 and 1967), proof of infertility was mentioned least often among the eight leading points on which agency practice had become more flexible. (Hylton, op.cit.; Riday, op. cit.)

13. Two earlier studies of Negro adoptions discuss matching without reporting questions concerning its necessity. (Fanshel, op. cit.; Dukette and Thompson, op. cit.)

14. This intermingling of color and class, already suggested in connection with the "male ego threat", takes on importance because it enters into other class-race confusions--for example, popular assumptions about Negro-white differences in attitudes toward marriage and illegitimacy. (Hylan Lewis, "Culture, Class and Family Life Among Low-Income Urban Negroes" in Employment, Race, and Poverty, Arthur Ross (Ed.). New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967; Elizabeth Herzog, About the Poor: Some Facts and Some Fictions, Children's Bureau Publication No. 451, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D. C. 20402: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968, 55 pp.)

15. Research relating to one-parent adoptions is reviewed by Alfred Kadushin in "Single Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research", Social Service Review 44:3:263-274, September 1970.

16. The point receives a good deal of research support. (Elizabeth Herzog and Cecelia E. Sudia, Boys in Fatherless Families, Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D. C. 20402: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1970.)

17. We have accepted "trans-racial" as the general term to cover the placement of black and racially mixed children in white homes. Some agencies have developed a rather specialized terminology, using "trans-racial" to mean the placement of a black child in a white home, and "inter-racial" to mean a child of mixed racial background in a white home, or either type of child in a home with a cross-racial marriage.

18. Until recently, "bi-racial" children have been classified as Negro, no matter how slight the admixture. It is a change in social definition to have them increasingly identified as a separate group--a change not reflected so far in firm or standardized definitions by social agencies or statistical record-keeping centers.

Partly for this reason, firm figures are lacking about the proportions of black and "bi-racial" children placed with white parents, and estimates vary. An informal survey concludes that between one-fourth and one-third of the black and "mixed-race" children adopted in 1968 and 1969 were placed with white parents. (Charles B. Olds, "Results of Survey of Interracial Adoption in the United States in 1968" and "Adoption of Black Children in 1969", Opportunity Newsletter(s), 2301 Glisan Street, Portland, Ore. 97210.) A number of considerations preclude taking the figure literally: the 1969 estimate is based on responses from 342, or 68 percent, of 500 agencies to whom the questionnaire was sent; no details are given about definitions, especially of "mixed race" and "other non-white"; above all, there is a possibility that the same placement could be reported by a state and a local agency, or by a public and a voluntary agency, or in more than one year. The estimate can, however, be regarded as supporting a widespread impression that placements of nonwhite children with white parents have increased in recent years. This probability, in turn, relates to the complaint of many respondents that efforts to place black children with white families have been more energetic than efforts to place them with black families.

19. According to a recent article in Children (Ursula Gallagher, "Adoption Resources for Black Children", Children 18:2:49-53, March-April 1971):

> "Seven States have passed legislation permitting subsidy from tax funds to families that have adopted children--California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and South Dakota. Some of these States are now beginning to implement such legislation. Their regulations differ, but all require the subsidy plan to have been arranged before the adoption has been completed and all set a limitation on the amount of the subsidy. A few set a maximum family income for eligibility for the subsidy. Some limit eligibility to couples who are adopting their former foster child. Subsidies may be for a short time or a long time or an indefinite period, according to the individual family's need. Voluntary agencies have taken the lead in providing subsidies...." (Child Care Association of Illinois, Subsidized Adoption: A Call to Action. Springfield, Ill., 1968.)

The recent addition of North Dakota raises to eight the number of states with legislation permitting subsidized adoptions.

It is difficult to draw a sharp line between the various types of subsidized adoption and foster care. The following definitions seem to be generally accepted.

Subsidized adoption: a plan to combine the best features of permanent foster care and adoption. The family gains the legal status of adoption, but the agency, or state, continues some subsidy. This may consist of regular monthly payments, or payment only for medical care, or the subsidy may be for only a few months or a few years. The parents have all the legal rights of regular adoption, but retain the income and other services, as necessary, from the agency.

Permanent foster care (sometimes synonymous with quasi-adoption): when a child is not available for adoption, but will not be able to return to his own home, the agency may discuss "permanent" placement with the foster family and the child. If all agree, the placement becomes permanent. Maintenance payments and/or medical care and other services will be continued as needed. Such arrangements can vary considerably, depending on the needs of the child and the capacity of the family. It is usually understood that the arrangement may become a regular adoption if the child becomes legally free. While the agency retains legal rights concerning the child, planning would ordinarily be the perogative of the family.

Foster family care: an arrangement with a woman or a family to provide homelike care for a dependent child. Such care may be temporary or long term, depending on the needs of the child. Ordinarily the foster parent receives a set amount of maintenance per month, plus clothing and medical expenses as necessary, but decisions about and planning for the child remain with the agency involved.

All three plans tend to involve the same socio-economic level: those low-income families who have the attributes necessary to be successful parents, but who have such limited income that they cannot assume the added financial responsibilities.

20. Willingness to modify the age restriction was the item on which the largest number of agencies were reported willing to be flexible, both in 1962 and 1967. (Hylton, op. cit.; Riday, op. cit.)

21. Special efforts to increase the number of adoptive homes for black children are by no means novel. Published accounts of them extend back to the early fifties and beyond. For the most part, such efforts have assumed that a large part of the problem was lack of public information, and have placed much emphasis on educational campaigns through the mass media.

A few studies have challenged the hypothesis of public ignorance, claiming that the black community is, in fact, informed about adoption. (Connecticut Child Welfare Association, op. cit.; Deasy and Quinn, op. cit.)

There may be some question whether information about the possibility of adoption and about the existence of the need means vivid understanding of the extent of need and the facts about adoption. At the same time, the prevailing assumption that the most effective method of recruitment is through the mass media, and the fact that this assumption is questioned chiefly by those with experience in recruitment efforts, leaves the question open. If the need and the facts are not fully known, the mass media offer one important means of publicizing them. The giving of information is related to, but not identical with, the recruiting of adoptive parents.

An unpublished review, conducted by the Children's Bureau, of relevant studies published before 1963, came to the following conclusions concerning efforts to increase the number of adoptive homes through mass media campaigns: (1) Educational campaigns are well worth while, but they cannot be expected to correct the main problem since they are not directed to the main problem. (2) The large numbers of unplaced Negro babies and the insufficient numbers of Negro adoptive homes do not indicate that there is less interest in adoption among Negroes than among whites. They do reflect the prevalence of lower incomes and the concomitant high incidence of broken homes. These two conditions, in turn, reflect the status--both social and economic--of a minority group in an affluent society (Herzog and Bernstein, op. cit.)

A recent study conducted by Billingsley and Giovannoni in four large cities, includes the following comments:

> "No systematic assessment has been done of the effectiveness of the mass media approach. There are at least two negative impressions, however, among staff members we interviewed. The first, is that the emotional tone of the appeals for homes--often photographs of a small, tearful, black, homeless child--brings in a more hysterical than a lasting genuine interest. The other is, that many agencies experience, even when the approach has been specific to black families, a huge influx of inquiries from white families, but only a small increase in the numbers of black inquiries. Although they continue to utilize the mass media, none of the agencies seemed

particularly impressed with the results. As noted, the appeals are not based on any validated information about black families, but rather what is supposed by the agencies to be misconceptions about adoption among black people. It could well be that none of these are valid suppositions. More importantly, there is the possibility that large areas of concern are being overlooked--the simplest one being the potential apprehension a black couple might feel in approaching a white agency. Perhaps, pictures of black agency personnel would be much more effective in dispelling this kind of apprehension than those of tearful black children ever could be."
(Billingsley & Giovannoni, op. cit.)

22. Such suggestions receive support from a conclusion reached in a study by the Child Welfare League of America: "In the opinion of the caseworkers many of the requests for foster care would have been obviated if adequate economic support and social services had, at an earlier date, been available to and used by the families. (Child Welfare League of America, The Need for Foster Care--An Incidence Study of Requests for Foster Care and Agency Response in Seven Metropolitan Areas. Conducted under Child Welfare Research and Demonstration Grant PR-500, Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1969, 73 pp.)

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

The interviews were held in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, D. C., and were conducted by interviewers familiar with the metropolitan area assigned to them. Interviewers were not given a list of individuals, but were asked to make their own selection of 20 respondents each, in accordance with the following criteria:

Six agency people at different levels, especially practitioners with direct experience in placing black children, in both public and private agencies; possibly someone on the planning group of a welfare council; possibly a member of an agency board.

Six adoptive parents, either black or involved in trans-racial adoption, possibly including an adoptive applicant who had been rejected.

Six representatives of community groups and organizations. The following list was suggested as possibilities, but selection was left to the interviewer: Black Panther or Black Muslim and/or other militant group, or militant member of university staff; National Welfare Rights Organization; Urban League; church group, preferably one interested in foster care and/or adoption and one not interested, or possibly an interested sorority; poverty parent, not an adoptive parent; possibly a foster parent; member of some community group which is especially interested in adoption.

The list left open two selections to be added where the interviewer thought most appropriate.

All respondents were chosen because of some special expertise or relationship to the problem or because of their acquaintance with the black community. Several respondents combine two or three of these attributes.

The number and characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Over three-fourths are black, and there are twice as many females as males. There are more adoptive parents than agency people, and more "community representatives" than either. According to a very rough and impressionistic rating, the great majority are categorized as "middle class". The original plan was to have 20 interviews in each of the five cities. However, due to the transfer of our Los Angeles interviewer, only 15 interviews were completed in that city, and a total of 25 were held in the metropolitan area of Washington, D. C.

TABLE I: SURVEY RESPONDENTS

	Total	Black	White	Both	Male	Female	Both	Agency	Adoptive Parent	Community Representative	Middle	Lower Middle	Working	Lower	Atlanta	Chicago	Los Angeles	NY City	District of Columbia
Total	100	78	20	2	27	53	20	28	32	40	76	12	4	8	20	20	15	20	25
Black	78				23	41	14	18	24	36	54	12	4	8	16	12	15	16	19
White	20				4	12	4	10	7	3	20	-	-	-	4	6	-	4	6
Both	2				-	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Male	27							4	4	19	23	2	-	2	7	5	4	5	6
Female	53							24	14	15	37	8	3	5	10	10	8	14	11
Both	20							-	14	6	16	2	1	1	3	5	3	1	8
Agency	28										28	-	-	-	6	5	3	7	7
Adoptive Parent	32										20	7	3	2	6	7	7	7	5
Community Repr.	40										28	5	1	6	8	8	5	6	13
Middle	76														16	18	7	13	22
Lower Middle	12														2	1	5	3	1
Working	4														1	-	1	2	-
Lower	8														1	1	2	2	2

A variation in the original plan was the holding of 21 interviews that included more than one person. One of these included three, and two included four respondents; all but one of the others were joint interviews with married couples, of whom all but four were adoptive parents. The majority of the adoptive parents are black.

In coding the joint interviews, agreement between the respondents was counted as one opinion, and disagreement was coded as "mixed opinion"--as was ambivalence or indecision reported by a single respondent. Each interview was counted as one unit, so that the proportions mentioned in the report are based on a total of 100. Thus, although proportions are reported by interview rather than by individual respondents, the total number of individuals who contributed to interviews is 126.

The agency people represent a variety of experience, affiliation, and job classification. Seventeen represent experience in public agencies and 11 are with private or voluntary agencies. Eighteen of the 28 are black. A number are adoption workers, some of whom are specializing in recruitment. Others have experience in coordination of agencies and the development of adoption resource exchanges. Some are social workers with many years of experience, while others are young and relatively new in the field, with the viewpoint of a younger generation.

The adoptive parents interviewed also cover a wide range: highly trained professionals, including some working in the adoption area, lower-middle class, blue collar, and a few who can definitely be classified as low-income. Most of their adoptive children were placed by agencies, but there are three instances of informal placement and one of foster parent adoption. Some of the adoptive parents have been active in recruitment efforts, but others have had no such involvement. Altogether, 24 black, 6 white, and 2 interracial adoptive families are represented by the adoptive parents interviewed. The white parents have children ranging from "light enough to pass" to very dark-skinned. The respondents include two one-parent adoptive mothers and a one-parent adoptive father.

No finally-rejected applicants are included, although one or two couples gave information about an early refusal, followed by "agency shopping", which enabled them eventually to receive a child. Two white couples also reported conflict with agencies over the placement of black children. All the adoptive parents gave clear evidence of being well pleased with the placement, so that no dissatisfied clients are represented among those interviewed.

"Community representatives" are also a highly varied group, in background and in experience. They include a black judge, the minister of a middle-class urban church, a lawyer who specializes in adoption,

an anthropologist who has studied the "black ghetto", and individuals on the policy-making levels of national organizations. Also included are a local president of the National Welfare Rights Organization, some young black males active in militant groups and some engaged in community action projects, as well as aides engaged in day care and other child-oriented services and recruitment. Most of the community representatives are black.

APPENDIX B: COMMENT ON METHOD

An unexpected feature of these responses is the extent of agreement between the three types of respondents (adoptive parents, agency people, and community representatives) on many of the points discussed. Substantial opinion contrasts are noted where they occur, but absence of contrast is far more frequent. And, on the whole, there is little difference between the views of blacks and whites or of males and females, among those interviewed.

In considering the results of this kind of inquiry, it is necessary to bear in mind that the degree of consensus, or the lack of it, have different implications in different contexts. When the points under consideration involve the views held by the kinds of people interviewed, it is important to know where there is strong consensus and where opinions divide or are ambivalent, for these points sketch out the territory to be covered by recruitment efforts.

When the points under consideration involve suggestions for conducting recruitment efforts, the views of those with experience carry a good deal more weight than those of the inexperienced; and the informed testimony of a single respondent may merit more consideration than the speculation of a majority. That most of the respondents assume TV publicity would help is no news, given the publicity-reflex prevalent in the United States today. That the majority of those with experience in such efforts also accept the desirability of mass media campaigns is more impressive, although some discount must be made for the "glow effect" often associated with campaigns. That a minority of those with experience express doubt about such campaigns merits more serious consideration than their numbers might suggest, since they are pitting their experience against a popular assumption.

It must be remembered also that, when points are volunteered, a substantial minority--say one out of three--carries more weight than the same proportion would in response to a pre-structured questionnaire. In the present instance, for example, respondents were asked about deterrents to adoption. They were not asked specifically about the "male ego threat", but over one-third mention this as a deterrent. And, whether the attitude is spontaneous or--as a few claim--artificially induced, the fact remains that it now exists for a number of people and therefore must be taken into account. Similarly, no question was asked about alternatives to adoption. That one-fifth of the respondents volunteered suggestions about alternatives is therefore more impressive than the same proportion would be in answer to a direct question.